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August 2003 Issue #229

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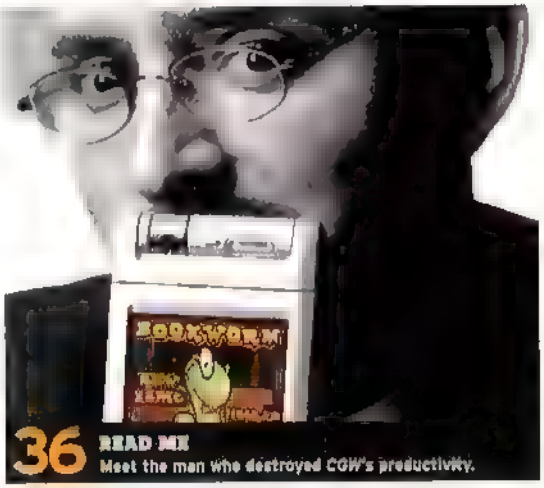

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Best in Show

Coming up at next year's E3: the swimsuit competition!

Every May, features editor Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen ceremoniously dons his glow-in-the-dark Spider Man propeller beanie and winds up the rubber band on the official *CGW* clown car. Thus marks the official start of E3 for the *CGW* staff. We then pile into the car and make the six-hour pilgrimage down to Los Angeles, where we spend the next three days in an alcohol-induced fog under the pretense that we are actually "covering" the convention for this magazine. It's a pretty cool scam.

E3—the Electronic Entertainment Expo—is the yearly Big Event of the gaming industry. The whole year revolves around it. Companies are either spending a gajillion dollars getting ready for E3, dealing with the fallout because their game looked so crappy at E3, or stressing out about next year's E3. All in an effort to garner positive spin and hype from the motley collection of fools, half wits, and slackers that make up the gaming press (present company included, of course).

While E3 always tends to be a lot of fun, in the last year or so there has been, unfortunately, an increasing air of shrill desperation to the proceedings. Why? Because everyone wants that damn "Best of Show" award. Now, it's not enough just to show your game and get a positive reaction to it. Now, you have to win the award or somehow you've "failed." It's turning into a beauty contest.

E3 is turning into a beauty contest.

It's maddening to deal with, on our side, because even though we contribute to the problem by making these idiotic Best of Show lists in the first place—as we do in this issue. It should also be understood that if we didn't put your game on this list, it doesn't mean we didn't think your game was cool. For example, for any number of arbitrary reasons, *Halo* for the PC is not in our Top 10, but for me personally it was one of the best things I saw this year. Now ship it already.

What's most important to understand, for both the game companies and for you, dear reader, is that these lists, at best, mean nothing more than "most promising" or "coolest looking in theory, we suppose." Because these are unfinished products. (Our Game of the Show for the last three years—*Star Wars Galaxies*, *Republic*, and, ahem, *Halo*—are still not out yet.) Many of these "best in show" games may bear little resemblance to the actual finished products—if they ever ship. You want one word to describe E3 in its totality? Try this one: Superficial.

Sorry. I don't mean to be cranky. I love E3. And I love you, too. This year's show was actually the most satisfying one in years, with the PC justly regaining much of the spotlight stolen by the consoles. So stop listening to my whining. There are lots of great games inside.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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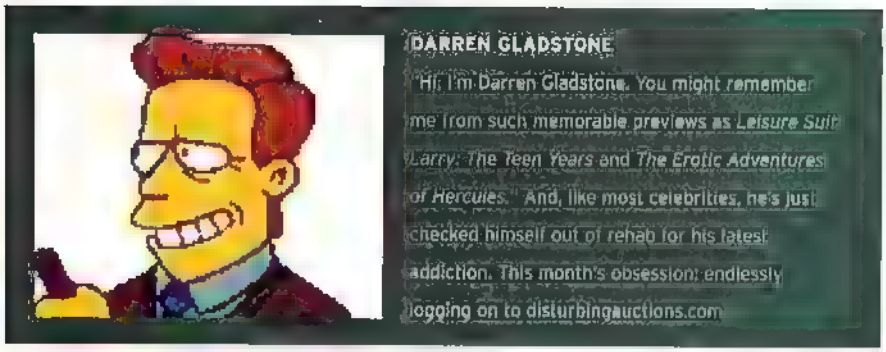
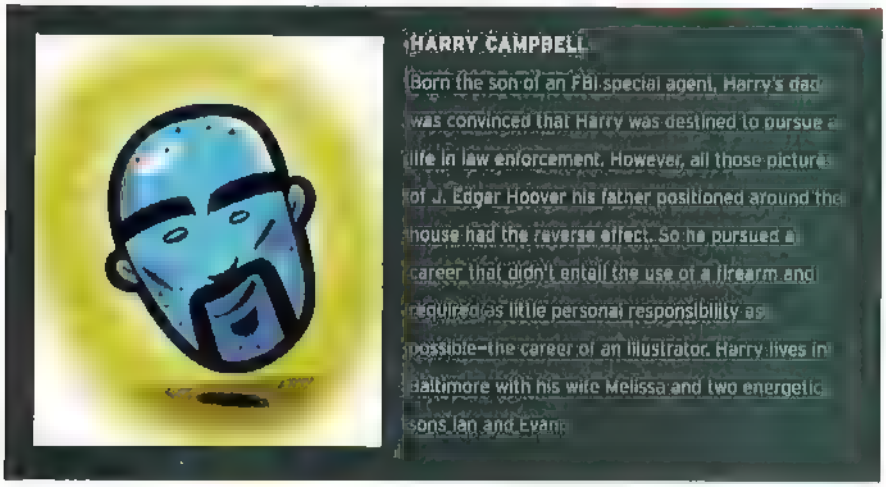


DARREN GLADSTONE

"Hi, I'm Darren Gladstone. You might remember me from such memorable previews as *Leisure Suit Larry: The Teen Years* and *The Erotic Adventures of Hercules*. And, like most celebrities, he's just checked himself out of rehab for his latest addiction. This month's obsession: endlessly logging on to disturbingauctions.com

MARK ASHER

Swashbuckling gallant, raconteur, bon vivant, one of the people the people-watchers peep at—contributing writer Mark Asher is none of these because he's too busy playing games until a quarter to three and worrying about life's ineffable mysteries, such as why Sea Monkeys don't really look like monkeys. On his deathbed, he will be asked if he regretted spending so much time playing games, and his answer will be: "Only *Black & White*."



HARRY CAMPBELL

Born the son of an FBI special agent, Harry's dad was convinced that Harry was destined to pursue a life in law enforcement. However, all those pictures of J. Edgar Hoover his father positioned around the house had the reverse effect. So he pursued a career that didn't entail the use of a firearm and required as little personal responsibility as possible—the career of an illustrator. Harry lives in Baltimore with his wife Melissa and two energetic sons Ian and Evan.

TOM EDWARDS

The only staff member not to go to E3, copy editor Tom Edwards spent his time alone in the office pretending he was Hank Williams, rifling through coworkers' desks, and working on his upcoming PC release, *El Gatito de la Muerta*.

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TOP 10 PICK OF 2003 - COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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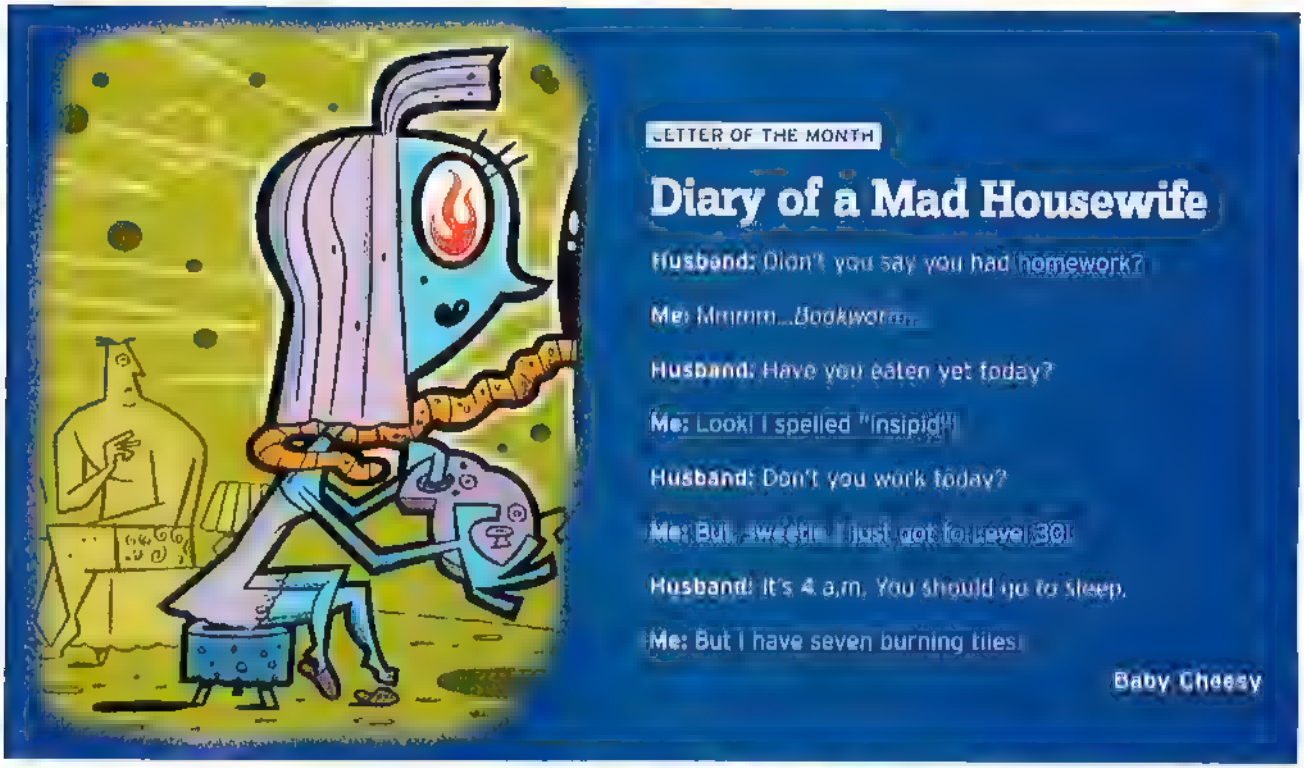
Letters

Don't be afraid to care at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com



Actual genuine fan mail!

Thank you for one of the best issues I have ever had the pleasure of reading (July 2003). You may have been faced with an overwhelming slew of bad games (to review) but boy, did you ever make up for it. Previews of *The Sims 2*, an art cle about the NV35, *Halo*, *Republic*, and a decent tech review by Wil. And the more I read of Tom and Bruce's Gamer's Edge matches, the better they get, so keep them coming. You guys rock!! Oh yeah, kudos and 10 points to whomever used the *Aliens* reference on page 67: "Game over, man. Game over." Truly a classic.

Peace out

Jimi

Harold and the purple vomit

Just a comment about the *Sims 2* cover (July 2003). I love how the father is cheering on his redheaded son, who's beating up his little sister as the scantily clad mother ignores the crying young ster. The best part, however, is how no one not ces that the baby on the floor is vom ting up a bright neon purple colored

substance. Exactly how many crayons did the little tyke have to eat to come up with that shade of purple?

DEVo

Sexy time!

In the June issue, someone said "I am tired of opening a magazine (even a computer gaming magazine) and seeing pictures of real/fake scantily clad women." Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't pictures of "scantily clad women" the whole point of a computer gaming magazine?

Christian

Last month, a letter was sent to you on the topic of porn. I agree wholly with his opinions, for I am female, and the pictures are not "cheesecake" for me. I think that a gaming mag should be a gaming mag...not an edited *Playboy* mag.

Rowen

OK, just to show that we aren't completely sexist here at CGW, here's a little something for the ladies this month.

Actually, Di was referring to Groucho Marx

Dudes (and dudette),

Di Luo needs to go back to poli-sci class. In his July review of *Tropico 2:*

"How many crayons did the little tyke eat to come up with that shade of purple?"

DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY THAT THE NUBIANS SET FOOT ON THE MOON?

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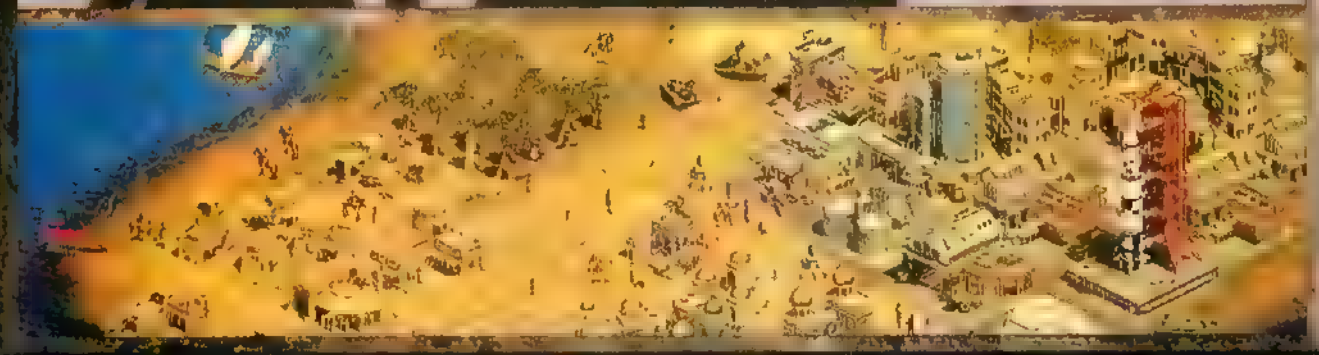


MAKE HISTORY

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

BIG HUGE GAMES

Microsoft game studios

POWERED BY gamespy

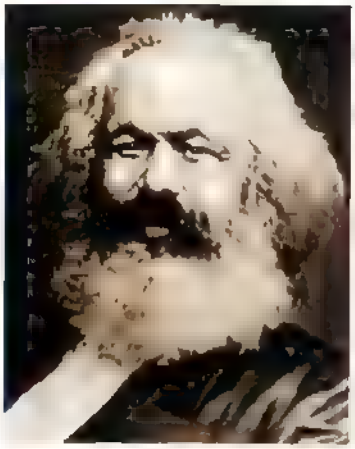
www.riseofnations.com

MAIL BITES

I'm just writing to let you know that William O'Neal is the man. I wanna be just like him, except not black. If you got a problem with Wil, you got a problem with ME.
Wisk

Computer games this month must really suck for you guys to put the freaking *Sims 2* on the cover. My condoleness to whoever had to do the article.
Sam Allison

Is Robert Coffey just a nasty hateful writer, or are you guys purposely giving him games that stink?
Landshark



Pirate Cove he says the game is "a dissertation on Marxist economic theory," where the "product of the proletariat's labor is used to increase the happiness of the ruling elite." That sounds pretty intellectual (lots of syllables), and it does describe how communist societies generally end up working in practice, but it's incorrect. A Marxist would say that *Tropico 2*'s economic model describes a capitalist society. In a Marxist society, the slaves in *Tropico 2* (the proletariats) would rise up against the ruling elite (the pirates) and oust them. All labor would be for the common good, and the product of that labor would be spent among everyone equally. Not that I'm some commie pinko....

You're my favorite gaming magazine because of your smart writing, but sometimes you tend to outsmart yourself. Then again, I tend to nitpick.

Jason Drury

Robert Coffey: love and hate

It was extremely refreshing to see your Scorched Earth article in the June 2003 issue of *CGW*. I also wanted to commend you on the first zero-star *CGW* review (in the same issue). I read with horror and disbelief that a game like *Postal 2* was created, and with the profound satisfaction that the publisher and developer are being called out on their lack of context for the statement they're apparently trying to make.

Thanks for taking on the tough topics and shaking my fellow gamers and me out of our collective *Trailer Park Tycoon*-induced stupors so that maybe we'll open our eyes and see what kinds of messages are being shoved subliminally down our throats. At the risk of sounding clichéd, "Thanks for keepin' it real, dawg!"

Jason Fields

After reading your article "The Gong Show," I've come to two conclusions. 1) You have no sense of humor, and 2) you need a new career, since you can't seem to handle this one. The majority of people find stereotypes amusing because they are smart enough to realize that not everyone in a group acts a certain way. You don't seem able to distinguish between insulting stereotypes and mocking the idea of stereotypes.

The computer games industry has a lot of controversy; since you can't seem to cope with the high stress of controversy, maybe you should find a different job. Like living in a tree in order to prevent it from being chopped down. Trees have feelings, too (or at least the Sierra Club thinks so).

Here's some free advice that I think many people would tell you: Lighten up.

Tiv Akil

I think the reason people send you letters defending racism and sexism or whatever is because they are sick and tired of hearing people whine about it when it isn't even a real issue. I'm just happy that there are people out there who have the balls to stand up to political correctness.

Tom Ball
Edmonds, Washington

["The Gong Show"] was an EXCELLENT article. I commend it for bringing to light questionable material, and I hope that those who condemn your writing have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of an Asian American who may have just installed the game for the first time and then played the game. I'd be shocked and disgusted. In fact, I am shocked and disgusted that the production, development, and publishing teams didn't think this was any big deal. I'm a white guy who doesn't completely understand this, mainly because I'm not of any "real" minority myself, but I can certainly see why other people would be upset.

I'm writing you to basically tell you that I approve of your article 100 percent, and I hope to read more quality journalism like this in the future. Thanks for writing this article, and tell your critics to STFU!

Seth Cunningham

Mr. Coffey went "postal" in his semi-hysterical "review" (and I use the term lightly) of *Postal 2* [July 2003]. To review the review: Mr. Coffey's politically correct diatribe underscores why games like *Postal 2* are necessary. Mr. Coffey ignored the gameplay, graphics, and sound to criticize the game's politically incorrect sense of humor. And this game *does* have a sense of humor—your reviewer doesn't.

I've played the game, and I very much like it. The review told readers almost nothing about the game. All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a humorless prig. *Postal 2* deserved better, much better, than Mr. Coffey's PC hatchet job. I give this review no stars.

Jonathan Sprague

I was reading your July 2003 magazine, and you said the only thing worse than *Postal 2* was boxed syphilis. Well, I sell boxed syphilis and I don't like you jerks bashing my product. I don't say the only thing worse than canned AIDS is *CGW*, do I?? DO I?!?? Other than that, your magazine is all right.

Barry Levites

And more politics!

As a long-time subscriber to your magazine, I was disappointed to see two different stupid and pointless jabs at Republicans in your July 2003 issue (page 53, Cheney, and page 54, Bush). Although this may shock you, some of your readers are *gasp*—Republicans! I know it may be hard for you to grasp since you apparently live and work in the San Francisco area, but a sizable segment of the population isn't made up of liberal Democrats.

I don't care what your politics are—what I subscribe to your magazine for is our supposedly common interest in computer games. Why your staff feels it necessary to turn your magazine into an opportunity to make their personal political views known is a mystery to me. I don't recall jokes about Clinton when he was president. I complained about this very thing a year or so ago (Wil O'Neal was the culprit then). If you want to ignore me, mock me, or whatever, go right ahead, just remember, I don't have to be your customer.

Brian Bursiek

Just take solace in the fact that as a result, large FBI files have probably been opened on all of us. Especially Wil.

"All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a prig."

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

MYTHIC

The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

www.darkageofcamelot.com

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone

SHADOW-LANDS

Last year's expansion, *The Notum Wars*, actually made *Anarchy Online* fun to play. Now, Funcom is turning its online world on its ear with *Shadowlands*. There's a deep story here, no doubt, but the long and short of it is this: The greedy Omni-Tek corporation unintentionally forces open a hole in reality while trying to research the Notum ore. What they find on the other side is the Shadowlands—a metaphysical dimension deep in the throes of all-out war. Omni-Tek sides with the vicious Unredeemed, the fight rages on—oh, and a vortex is threatening to destroy all existence on this plane. Got all that? Good, maybe you can explain it to us before next month's preview.

This big fella lumbering ever closer is one of the 40 to 50 unique creatures in the Shadowlands. There will be a total of roughly 500 new creatures and NPCs in the world.

This is one example of some high-level armor new to AO. Only available at the floating city of Gaba.

ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

As a part of Operation: Enduring Nerd-dom, we see here a crack troop on patrol in front of the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo. Ira "Wild Man" Messershmidt (names have been changed due to classified intel), in the gun turret, leads Easy Company through the show floor. We've got our own reports from E3, where we've seen the rebirth of PC gaming—and it is good! Check out our feature on page 56 to see the best of the show.

ARMY
AR Y

EB GAMES

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GAMESPOT

Read Me

Crazy riffs from the gaming beat Edited by Ken Brown

PUBLIC POLICY

Child's Play?

Lawmakers continue to try to restrict kids' access to violent videogames By Ken Brown

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Breaking through in North Africa and Monte Cassino...
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Warcraft-style RTS for good
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Politicians continue to fight to restrict kids' access to Mature games, but they haven't won a case yet. On June 3 the Eighth U.S. Court of Appeals again found that games are protected under the First Amendment. Lawmakers don't like the fact that kids can buy games with violent or sexual content, but the court found no compelling reason to regulate the sale of Mature games at retail.

Games are in good company since movies, music, and videos aren't regulated either. There is no law saying a kid can't go into an R-rated movie. Theater owners voluntarily adopted a policy not to allow children under 17 to view those films. According the FTC, kids can get into an R-rated movie in about half of the theaters they visit.

But the FTC's numbers for minors who attempt to buy M-rated games is closer to 80 percent. Some retailers have been unwilling to even adopt a policy to prevent the sale of Mature games to kids, let alone try to enforce it.

Which has caught the attention of politicians like Mary Lou Dickerson of Washington. In May Washington State passed a law sponsored by Dickerson that would impose fines on retailers for selling violent videogames to minors. If it survives the inevitable constitutional challenge, Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17. Violators from store owners to clerks could be fined up to $500 per incident.

"I believe violent videogames do harm children," says Dickerson. "I'm both a mom and someone who has worked extensively with at-risk kids. I also was trained in operant conditioning in graduate school and I know the power of these games to operantly condition players."

Dickerson says recent research shows that violent games can lead to aggressive behavior in children. She also cites real-life incidents of violence such as murders in Minneapolis and carjackings in Oakland that she believes were inspired by a *Mortal Kombat* game and *Grand Theft Auto III*, respectively. She also referred to the April school shooting in East Germany that resulted in the deaths of 16 people plus the assailant. After the massacre, stories emerged that the troubled student played *Counter-Strike*. Much like Columbine, the murders triggered a national debate about the impact of videogame violence, with some German legislators calling for an immediate ban on sales of first-person shooters.

"I'm not saying all videogames are evil

Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball is one of the few games to carry a Mature rating.

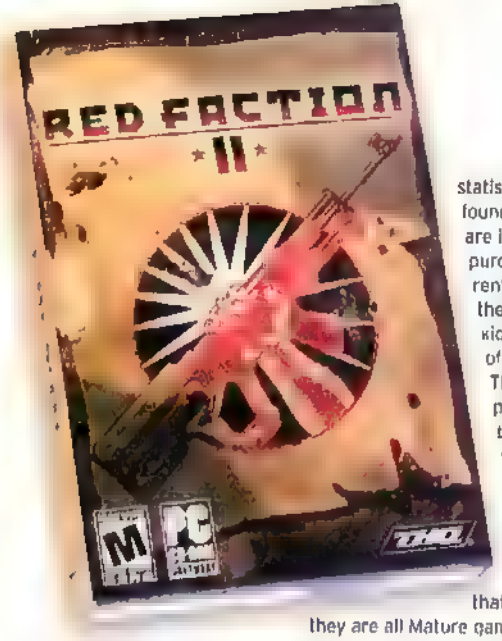
Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17.

I know there are a lot of great games out there, and a lot of very responsible players and very responsible parents. What I am for is blocking the access of some ultra violent games from minors," says Dickerson.

...And in this corner

The gaming industry and retailers want no part of Dickerson's law. The Interactive Digital Software Association and the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association are preparing a suit as this issue goes to press to challenge the constitutionality of the Washington statute. DSA president Doug Lowenstein says, "I think it's the wrong solution for this problem. We're very confident that this law is unconstitutional and it will be struck down."

Lowenstein admits that retail enforcement is "spotty and needs to get better." But he says lawmakers have exaggerated the problem for their own political purposes. He cites his own FTC



statistic, which found that "parents are involved in the purchase and rental of games they get for their kids 83 percent of the time." The remaining purchases may be made without parental involvement, but Lowenstein insists that that doesn't mean they are all Mature games.

"You can look at this and say this is some massive problem with retail, or you can say 'Hold on a sec, there is a problem and we need to get better at it at retail.' There is no evidence–none–that there are tens of thousands of minors buying Mature-rated games. In fact, all the available data from both our own research and if you talk with retailers and the federal government is that if a minor has a copy of *GTA3*, for example, chances are they got it from mom and dad."

What about the retailers?

PC and videogames sales account for $10 billion annually at retail. Given the money involved, the recent economic doldrums, and intense competition at retail, it's not surprising that retailers would be reluctant to start refusing sales to anyone, especially kids who want to buy games. But some retailers have done just that.

Wal-Mart, Target, Toys R Us, and KB Toys have adopted policies to prevent kids from buying Mature games, and some of them have implemented systems to prompt cashiers to card younger looking customers. Other retailers, such as Best Buy and Electronics Boutique, seem indifferent to the issue. The president of the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, Hal Halpin, says some of the retailers in the IEMA have purposefully chosen not to change their policy. "The rationale is likely that they have witnessed their competitors make the move to restricting the sale of M-rated games to minors, and then seen the ramifications of those voluntary efforts go unappreciated," he says. "Once a retailer formally announces that they are investing the considerable time and money into that effort, they are susceptible to spotlight-hungry politicians and the media who are out for quick sensationalism."

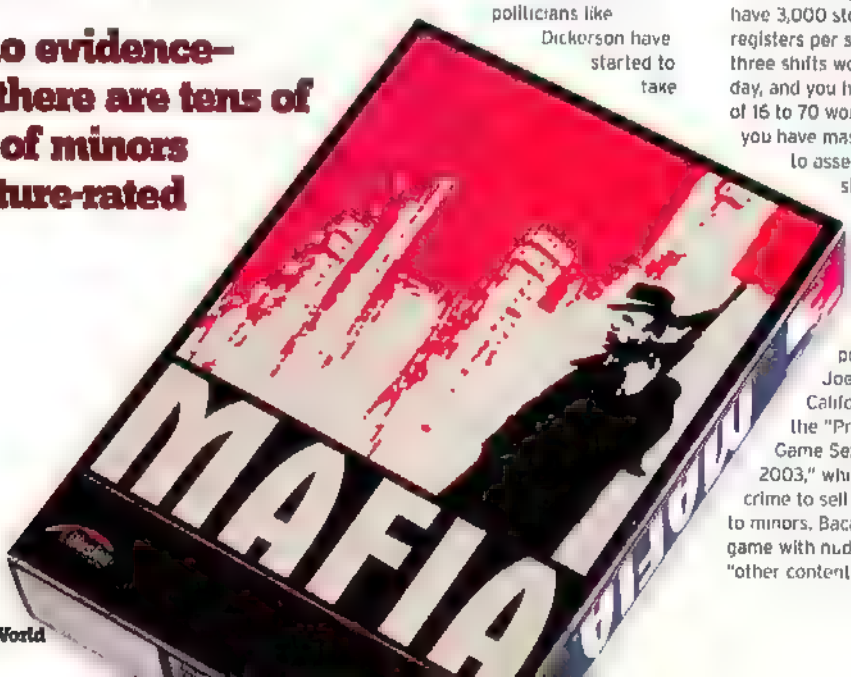
Games such as *Soldier of Fortune II* feature strong violence, but the courts say it hasn't been proven to be harmful to minors.

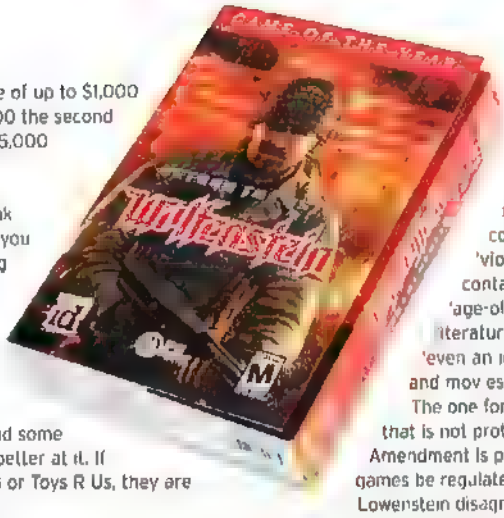
Such reluctance is why politicians like Dickorson have started to take aim. But Halpin and Lowenstein say the reasons for slow implementation are more complicated than critics realize. Says Halpin, "Implementing new procedures throughout our retail channel is not as simple as it is in other industries. When you go to a theater, for example, you're there to see a movie and purchase the corresponding ticket. Even in a multiplex that has 20 screens, that translates into 20 SKUs [stock keeping units, the common term for individual retail products]. Most of the [major] chains carry thousands of SKUs of varying assortment. In some of our retailers, games as a category represent less than one percent of their business. So, politicians don't understand the complexities of what we have been doing and the idiosyncrasies of implementing ideas."

Lowenstein puts it another way. "If you have 3,000 stores, and you have 10 or 15 registers per store, and you have two or three shifts working those registers a day, and you have people from the ages of 16 to 70 working those registers, and you have massive turnover in the store, to assert that this is easy is simply ignorant."

Some may argue that the only way to get the attention of all those clerks at all those stores is to threaten to punish them for ignoring the policy. Enter Congressman Joe Baca (Democrat) from California. Baca has submitted the "Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2003," which would make it a federal crime to sell or rent adult videogames to minors. Baca defines "adult" as a game with nudity, sexual conduct or "other content harmful to minors."

"There is no evidence–none–that there are tens of thousands of minors buying Mature-rated games."





Violators could face a fine of up to $1,000 the first time, up to $5,000 the second time and a minimum of $5,000 and/or 90 days in jail for subsequent offenses.

Lowenstein doesn't think much of the Baca bill: "If you think that by criminalizing the sale of these games you make it any easier to implement, you're wrong. The practical issues are there. They can be overcome, and they will be overcome, and some stores are getting much better at it. If you look at stores like KB or Toys R Us, they are doing a very good job."

Baca's bill is also anathema to Halpin. "Should laws pass and succeed in the long-term, it is likely that many retailers will pull M-rated product from their shelves for fear of seeing their employees carted off to jail for selling a Mario Brothers game. R-rated movies would likely be next."

Halpin's dire prediction is unlikely to come true, but we'll see if the Washington statute actually takes effect on July 27.

"We're very confident that these laws are unconstitutional and they will be struck down," says Lowenstein. "The way it's written, it's so vague that you would have no idea what content would be covered by it."

The recent appeals court ruling clearly backs that up: "If the First Amendment is versatile enough to 'shield the painting of Jackson Pollock, music of Arnold Schoenberg, or Jabberwocky verse of Lewis Carroll,' we see no reason why the pictures, graphic design, concept art, sounds, music, stories, and narrative present in video games are not entitled to a similar protection. The mere fact that they appear in a novel medium is of no legal consequence. Our review of the record convinces us that these 'violent' videogames contain stories, imagery, 'age-old themes of literature, and messages, 'even an ideology,' just as books and movies do.'

The one form of entertainment that is not protected by the First Amendment is pornography. Should games be regulated the same as smut? Lowenstein disagrees. "The analogy to porn is ignorant and stupid. There's a clear body of law that says that you can regulate obscene content. The Supreme Court has said so, and there's a specific test to define that. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that you cannot regulate violence, which is why we're confident in the outcome of [the Washington] case. There has never been anything comparable with respect to violence whether it's in games, in films, in books, or in other medium."

So it's unlikely that the Washington statue will survive its pre-enforcement challenge. If it fails, it will also make it less likely that other governors will sign such bills, since the state would have to pay the legal fees of organizations bringing suit (namely the IDSA and retailer groups).

But the issue isn't going to go away. With games like *GTA3* selling in the tens of millions, it's inevitable that there will be more games—with ever greater levels of sex and violence—that continue to push people's buttons. Perhaps by then more parents will pay attention to the ratings system and take an interest in what their kids are playing.

WHAT THEY SAID

"A ton of kids play this game [GTA3], and it's a status symbol in Washington State. The kids who have it get points for having sex with prostitutes and then brutally beating them to death. They get points for each time they kick that prostitute in the crotch. Is that what we want to teach our kids?"

–REPRESENTATIVE MARY LOU DICKERSON, WASHINGTON

"I think that adult content in videogames should be dealt with in the same way that adult magazines and videos are handled. I would say that if [the new law] is on par with the laws that handle adult magazines and videos, then it is a fair law."

–CHRIS TAYLOR, GAS POWERED GAMES

"I would say she's a better politician than she is a constitutional lawyer."

–DOUG LOWENSTEIN OF THE IDSA, REFERRING TO MARY LOU DICKERSON

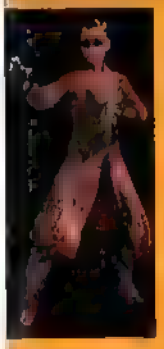
"I am not for censorship and I'm not for blocking the sale of any game. I'm a former journalist. I don't like censorship."

–REP. DICKERSON

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD: SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

Yes! You young'uns may not remember this one, but the original *Pirates!*, released in 1987, is one of the great PC gaming classics, a way-ahead-of-its-time genre blender that, along with *Civilization*, ensured Sid Meier's status as a legend. Firaxis' surprise E3 announcement that Sid is remaking the game, complete with a brand-new 3D engine, is cause for rejoice indeed. All we know is, we can't wait to make Wil walk the plank.



THE BAD: ENTER THE MATRIX

Gee, you couldn't see this one coming, could you? Yet another lame game based on a movie franchise. The bummer this time is that the franchise is an awesome one, and the gameplay possibilities seem fantastic. But once again, we have a shoddy product rushed out the door to cash in on the unsuspecting fanboys. The other few million will end up in a landfill somewhere, next to those 5 million Atari *E.T.* cartridges. And rightly so.

THE UGLY: 3DO GOES BUST

Like an old, sick horse, 3DO is finally being put out of its (and our) misery, and as sad as it is, we can't help but think that it's about damn time. The truth is, this company has been in a long, sad, slow decline for years now, criminally destroying and sullying the names of at least two great franchises—*High Heat* and *Might and Magic*—in the process. Remember what Neil Young said: "Rust never sleeps." Good night, 3DO.

THE CGW INTERVIEW

The Brains Behind Bookworm

Q&A with Jason Kapalka, the man who taught us all what "qua" means

After losing two months of my life to *Bookworm*, I sat down with the designer, Jason Kapalka—also the brains behind *Bejeweled*—to find out why he keeps torturing us with compulsively addictive puzzle games.

JG: Even my mom knows *Bejeweled* now.

JK: Yeah, lots of people in my bowling league play PopCap games. It's definitely different from the traditional computer game demographic. Personally, I like more hardcore games, but some are unnecessarily complex these days. We're trying to bring our games toward a simpler standard.

JG: So, did *Bejeweled* make you rich?

JK: It depends on your standards of "rich." I own a third of the company, so a lot of it is on paper—it's not money in the bank. We've sold nearly 500,000 units of *Bejeweled* in all its incarnations across different sites and platforms. But we're not obscenely rich because we're at nearly 20 employees.

JG: Tell me one thing about *Bejeweled* I don't know.

JK: Microsoft actually came up with that name for The Zone. Before that, it was *Diamond Mine*. In retrospect, *Bejeweled* is obviously a good name, but at the time it sounded terrible to me. It sounded like a topical reference to *Bedazzled*, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie.

JG: Let's move on to *Bookworm*. How did this game come about?

JK: It started out as an experiment by our head programmer, Brian Fiete. We wanted to make a word game that wasn't timed. It would have been easy to include a timer—to do so many words before time ran out—but that made it harder to come up with interesting words, which is what we wanted. After we had the basic theme, development time was about six months.

JG: Six months? How many people worked on the game?

JK: Four. Along with Brian, Nick Newhard did the coding, Tyson Henderson did most of the art, and I did most of the design. Oh, and I'm also the voice of Lex, the bookworm.

JG: Wait, you're that annoying high-pitched voice that says "Awesome!" when I make good words?

JK: Err...yes...that's me, pitch-shifted quite a bit. I'm also the guy who says "Go!" and "Game Over" in *Bejeweled*.

JG: Wow, that's kind of embarrassing.

JK: Yeah, I know.

JG: Okay, so what's up with Bookworm's language filter? Some words seem to get censored, but others don't.

JK: Yeah, this was tough. There were many debates over what's offensive and what's not. What about real words like "fellatio"? It's a great word, but do we really want that sitting on PopCap's high score board online? We still monitor the board to remove potentially offensive words that players post.

JG: The other annoying thing is the dictionary. It seems random what you guys choose to define.

JK: We couldn't define every word, because that would've made the program too large. The plan was to define only harder words, but, again, how do you define "harder" words? There's no foolproof way. Ultimately, we just tried to define all the tricky short words. We figured those who make 10-letter words know what they mean already.

JG: What's the maximum size word, by the way?

JK: Twelve letters. Some players have complained about that, believe it or not.

JG: What's your best word? Mine is "elevation."

JK: I'm not that good, actually. The best word anyone at PopCap has made is "apparition." But "elevation" is pretty good.

JG: So what's up next for you guys?

JK: Something new for us: an RPG, it's called *PopQuest*. It's like *Diablo Lite* or *NetHack for Moms*. And of course the inevitable *Bejeweled 2* and *Bookworm 2*.

JG: Oh no.

JK: Oh yes.

"'Bejeweled' sounded terrible to me—like a topical reference to *Bedazzled*, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie."

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL SANDERS

PREVIEW

SimCity 4: Rush Hour

Grand Theft SimCity By Thierry Nguyen

Will Wright's other big Sims franchise is getting its first expansion pack this fall. *SimCity 4: Rush Hour Expansion Pack* (a working title if we've ever seen one) will focus on enhancing the way people get around in their SimCities. Now you can add transit features like ferries, buses, subways, and light rails to your town. Players get more information about and control over their transportation options, one example is displaying not only the bus' travel route but the route of its commuters, showing you who is using it from where. Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your Sim's car and drive it around town. It's still being tested out at press time, but the team plans to possibly add the ability to control the helicopter and even a tank as potential awards.

As always, there's the requisite new disaster, which is the three-stage alien invasion. First, a massive spaceship beams up some poor Sim for an alien abduction, then it blasts some buildings down; the scenario ends with a bunch of little UFOs flying out and shooting up the place. Since players can now personalize points of interest, you'll feel more attached to Scooter Lane or Scooter Point when the aliens demolish them.

Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your Sim's car and drive it around your city.

Now you can put down names on everything. We want to make an "EA A OE'S" sign.

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#1

MIND GAMES

Part One

At *E3*, trying to hook up with my friend ***Bernie***.

So, where can I find you?

I'll be at Atari at 1 p.m.

by Scott McCloud

When I got there, Demo Guy* was showing Bernie the differences between combatants in the new ***Terminator*** game.

Compare this to, say, ***Battlefield 1942***...

The only difference between the ***Americans*** and the ***Germans*** was the kinds of ***guns*** they used!

Now...

...we all know what he ***MEANT*** of course.

But the unintentional ***irony*** of the statement points out how games often tend to reduce everything down to mere ***tactics***.

Writers know that the key to good ***characterization*** is in knowing what each character ***wants***.

Varied ***desires*** means varied and interesting ***conflicts***.

When creating characters in ***software***, though, it's easiest to fall back on just ***two basic motivations***.

Ally

Enemy

Can you imagine ***personal ads*** organized that way?

Hmm. Let's see... *Trying to kill me... trying to kill me... trying to kill me...*

Hey, ***here's*** one. "SWF 24... *Bystander.*"

Stylish productions like ***No One Lives Forever*** create effective characters through ***dialogue*** and ***voice acting***.

But as soon as the real ***gameplay*** begins, you really only need to know ***one thing*** about the people around you.

TRYING TO KILL YOU

Introducing ***true characterization*** into actua ***game-play*** won't be ***easy*** --

-- because as sophisticated as ***tactics-oriented A.I.*** has become --

-- having even the simplest ***conversations*** with our machines is still ***science fiction*** --

Good morning, Dave.

-- for ***now***.

To be continued

RECON

Medal of Honor: Breakthrough

New add-on for Allied Assault coming this fall By Ken Brown

Since *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* isn't scheduled to ship until early 2004, EA is hammering together another add on for *Allied Assault* to keep your trigger finger warm. *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault–Breakthrough* will be set in the European theater from 1943 to 1944 and will feature 11 new single-player levels in locations ranging from Kasserine Pass in North Africa, to Messina in Sicily, to the battle of Monte Battaglia in Italy.

The game will have nine new multiplayer maps, including the monastery at Monte Cassino, the streets of Messina, and Anzio Beach. A new multiplayer mode entitled Liberation will require captured teammates to be rescued in order to continue the fight.

The last *MOH* add-on, *Spearhead*, was a rocket ride that didn't last long. Here's hoping *Breakthrough* will be just as thrilling but offer a little more game for the money.

NEWS FEED

SHADOWBANE HACKED

Hundreds–perhaps thousands–of *Shadowbane* players were thrown into an uproar in late May when hackers wreaked havoc with the game. Wired.com reported that the inhabitants of an entire town were transported to the bottom of the sea, where they drowned. City guards attacked local residents, and swarms of new creatures suddenly appeared and slaughtered stunned players. Even newbies in neutral areas were hacked up by ax-wielding ogres, according to Wired. Wolfpack Studios and Ubi Soft posted a message acknowledging that a "serious attack" had occurred and vowing to "prosecute [those responsible] to the full extent of the law."

When the companies figured out what had happened, the game was restored to a previous point before the attacks began. Ubi Soft banned all of the members from two clans for "using teleport exploits." The members of those clans–whether or not they were involved in the hack–will lose all their property in the game, their cities will be left to die, and they will also be banned from other Ubi.com games.

MAX PAYNE 2 COMING NEXT MONTH

After a long dream sequence, Max Payne seems to be finally emerging in time for his big sequel. *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* is scheduled to ship this fall. Pick up the September issue of *CGW* for the exclusive first preview of this stylish, sexy, noir romance shooter.

BETTER BY DESIGN

"...WE DECLARE VOODOO PC'S EGAD THE WINNER. IT OFFERS *outstanding* PERFORMANCE, *confident* FIT AND FINISH, AND THE *best* OVERALL AESTHETICS IN THE COMPETITION."

... TECHNICAL EDITORIAL TEAM *maximum pc* MAGAZINE

"VOODOO'S EGAD IS ONE OF THE MOST *incredible* SYSTEMS I'VE EVER TESTED... THE *ferrari* OF GAMING SYSTEMS."

... WILLIAM O'NEAL TECHNICAL EDITOR *computer gaming world* MAGAZINE

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PREVIEW

Lords of EverQuest

In your face, Blizzard! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! By Robert Coffey

Lords of EverQuest is looking to bludgeon *WarCraft* by giving gamers more more more.

Okay, so maybe it's not a direct response, still it's hard not to see Sony Online's foray into RTS gaming as some kind of a reaction to Blizzard's moving their *WarCraft* franchise into the Sony dominated MMORPG world with *World of WarCraft*. Maybe it's coincidence, maybe it's revenge, or maybe it's just lust for the almighty dollar, but *EverQuest* is moving into a brand new neighborhood.

Lords of EverQuest is looking to bludgeon *WarCraft* by giving gamers more more more. More units, more players in multiplayer games, more magical items and artifacts, and more hero units. The game takes place some 10,000 years prior to events in the current version of *EQ*, and has to do with the Shadowrealms fighting the um, not-Shadowrealms for the typical complete and utter control of the world.

Yeah, OK, whatever. What really matters is that virtually everything in *EQ* is making the jump—and that includes both spells and monsters. Developer Rapid Eye Entertainment (made up of New World Computing vets, which is a very good thing) is promising a single player campaign that could take 70+ hours to complete. Also, for the first time ever Sony will deliver free, that's right free, online multiplayer gaming via a very Battle.net-like matching system. Our initial peek at this game was positive, with the 3D engine doing a fine job with terrain and rendering the plethora of units and heroes very well. The spell effects, however were serviceable if not particularly impressive.

Stay tuned for hands on impressions of *Lords of EverQuest* when the beta test begins. We're intrigued as to whether Sony can beat Blizzard at its own game.

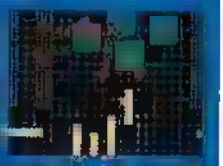
REAL GAMING. HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Shareware and freeware

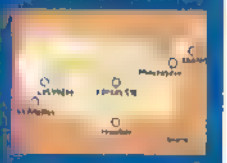
In this era of 4GB installs, it's easy to forget that games don't have to be complicated to be good. Here are three titles with play value that far exceeds their simple mechanics.

Free
www.3dartware.net
Don't let the screenshot fool you—a static image can't convey the bloody nonstop action of this freeware tribute to the click-and-play gem *Destruction Carnival*. Seven weapons randomly appear on the screen, and it's your job to pick them up and destroy waves of enemies. Sounds easy, but everything moves so fast that it's hard to dodge bullets and guard dogs, let alone shoot anything. The game takes up only a few megs of disc space, making it a terrific laptop diversion.

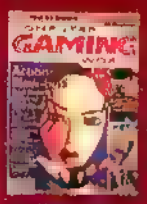


$24.95
www.meanpod.com
Starscape is best described as *Asteroids* on steroids. Action plays out on vast maps packed with enemies, asteroids, and bases; the entire game is tied together with a simple storyline and role-playing elements. It's a great combination, and graphics are colorful and varied enough to dispel complaints about the low fixed resolution.

$19.95
www.maximagames.com/carthief
Players are tasked with stealing cars across the U.S., with a variety of stats like locksmithing and electronics that improve with practice and training. Specialists can be hired to compensate for weaknesses, but they take a cut of the money, making it even tougher to pay off loan sharks or upgrade tools. It's packed with just enough surprises to justify the price.



5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*



Five Years Ago, August 1998

What game was everybody talking about in the summer of '98? Nothing, really. Our highest rated games that month were *Might and Magic VI*, *World Cup 98*, and the *Total Annihilation* expansion. Ho-hum. The big news was E3, where there was a terrific lineup of PC titles, just like this year. Back then we anointed *Homeworld* as Game of Show, but also called out *Half-Life*, *Grim Fandango*, *Age of Empires II*, and *Alpha Centauri*. OK, we also praised *Messiah*, but nobody bats 1,000.

Ten Years Ago, August 1993

Adventure games ruled 10 years ago, with reviews that ran three pages apiece! We proclaimed *Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist* a "laff riot and gave *The Seventh Guest* a thumbs-up even though its "very stringent hardware demands include a 386DX processor, 2MB of RAM, and a 16-bit SVGA video card with 512K of memory." Zoinks! You could run that baby on one of those computerized Japanese super-toilets today.

Fifteen Years Ago, August 1988

We celebrated our glorious 50th issue by announcing the winners of our essay contest. Here's the runner-up's entry: "I was playing *Dungeon Master* and crossed the room when I noticed some movement on the screen, and yelled to my friend 'Kill that Beholder!' My mom thought I was talking to her and picked up the mouse and attempted to kill the monster by applying the mouse directly to the screen."

DAY OF DEFEAT

World War II Online Action From the Makers of Counter-Strike!

IN STORES NOW

Connect with voice support.

Battle with authentic artillery.

Play WWII's greatest battles.

VALVE

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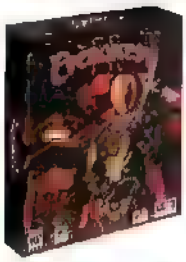
ACTIVISION

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

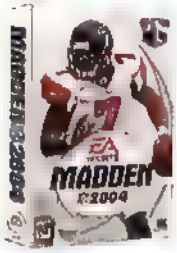
Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight *(Microsoft)* The next milestone in the award-winning Flight Simulator franchise. Experience history at the controls of historic aircraft, such as the Spirit of St. Louis, and the world's first successful powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer.

Homeworld 2 *(Sierra)* Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.



EverQuest II *(SOE)* Adds significant improvements over the original massively multiplayer online role-playing game with a completely new, cutting-edge 3-D engine with a host of technological features that generate an unparalleled, visually stunning 3-D world.



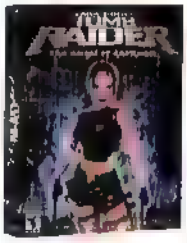
Madden NFL 2004 *(EA Sports)* The most complete, authentic sports video game ever. In-depth features like free online gameplay, new Quick Match play, League play, tournaments, and more career stats allow you to create championship caliber plays.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(LucasArts)* A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.

Warcraft III Expansion: The Frozen Throne *(Blizzard Entertainment)* Following in the tradition of previous Blizzard expansion sets, this game provides gamers with a vast new chapter in the epic Warcraft saga. Revisit the war-torn world of Azeroth where a new threat has arisen throughout the land.

Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Undrentide Expansion Pack *(Atari)* NWN's first official expansion pack includes a new 40-hour single player campaign plus game features new to Neverwinter Nights, such as additional D&D skills, feats, classes, monsters, weapons and spells.



Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness *(Eidos Interactive)* Lara Croft returns in Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. Accused of the murder of her one time mentor Von Croy and pursued by the police, Lara is drawn into a dark world of blood, betrayal and vengeance.

Enter the Matrix *(Atari)* Features awesome gunplay and spectacular martial arts that bend the rules of the Matrix. This game is an integral part of the experience, with a story that weaves in and out of The Matrix Reloaded, the sequel to the Academy Award®-winning film.

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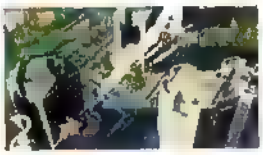
SURVEY!

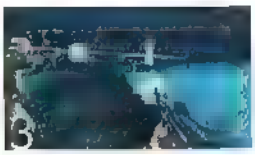
CGW Top 20

The gamers have spoken

Road to Rome: paved with gold and soaked in blood.



C&C: Generals nukes the competition.



Spearhead: WWII roller coaster of love.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome (EA)	★★★★½
2	Command & Conquer: Generals (EA)	★★★½☆
3	Medal of Honor: Spearhead (EA)	★★★½☆
4	Unreal II: The Awakening (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
5	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubi Soft)	★★★★½
6	SimCity 4 (EA)	★★★★☆
7	Freelancer (Microsoft)	★★★★½
8	RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 (Infogrames)	★★★½☆
9	Medieval: Total War (Activision)	★★★★★
10	Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)	★★★★☆
11	Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (LucasArts)	★★★★☆
12	Day of Defeat (Activision)	★★★★☆
13	Vietcong (Gathering of Developers)	★★★½☆
14	EverQuest: Legacy of Ykesha (Sony)	★★½☆☆
15	Bookworm (PopCap Games)	★★★★★
16	Civilization III: Play the World (Firaxis/Atari)	★☆☆☆☆
17	High Heat Baseball 2004 (3DO)	★★★☆☆
18	Impossible Creatures (Microsoft)	★★½☆☆
19	Galactic Civilizations (Strategy First)	★★★★½
20	Praetorians (Eidos)	★★★★☆

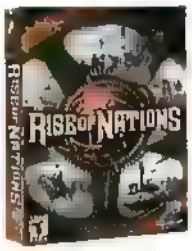
The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last six months. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES

Neverwinter Nights and Neverwinter Nights The Shadows of Undrentide Expansion Pack
(Microsoft)
Buy Both and Save 25%
See site for details.

Neverwinter Nights Features
- True Dungeons & Dragons role-playing utilizing the D&D 3rd Edition rule set
- Fast-paced RPG with an easily accessible interface suitable for new players and RPG veterans alike

Expansion Pack Features:
- New feats and skills such as Divine Might, Extra Music, Bull headed, tumble, and appraise
- New prestige classes such as Blackguard and Harper Scout
- New weapons, spells, and monsters



Rise of Nations
(Microsoft)
Regular Price: $49.99
Sale Price! $44.99

A sweeping scope of epic historical turn-based strategy games combined with the quick decision-making of real-time games. Move through the entire sweep of human culture quickly and have a satisfying game experience without playing for hours!

Features:
- Zooming scale goes from a territorial view to a close-up of individual units
- Accelerated multiplayer mode lets you quickly accumulate resources and move up through the ages.

The Sims Superstar Expansion Pack
(Electronic Arts)
Regular Price: $29.99
Sale Price! $24.99

Pursue the dream of being a Rock Star, Movie Star or a Supermodel and live the lifestyle of a celebrity.

Features:
- All new gameplay centered around a new fame score in the game UI
- Build skills and win famous Sim friends to advance through ten levels of fame
- All new "Studio Town" location with three distinct themes, movies, music, and fashion

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

amazon.com.

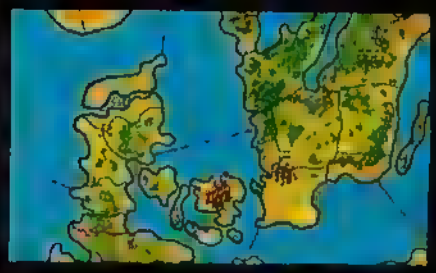
PIPELINE

Skip dates and slip dates for games in the channel By Di Luo

A note on the dating system: the quarter system that we list many games in divides the year into quarters with Jan-Mar being Q1, Apr-June being Q2, and so on. We can only give you approximate dates because the companies are often uncertain about the exact release dates.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2 Bohemia Interactive is hard at work on the sequel. Though details are scarce, we know that the game will take place between 1968 and 1974 during the wars by proxy between the two superpowers. They'll take place in three different locations: Southeast Asia, Central Europe, and Angola. While there will be graphics improvements, Bohemia promises the feel of the game will be true to the original.

DUNGEON SIEGE II Continuing the trend of announcements without screenshots, Microsoft unveiled plans for *Dungeon Siege II* during E3. Though it uses the same engine as the original, the graphics have been notched up quite a bit. Gas Powered Games, the developers, have been working on the sequel since the original came out, so they've had a lot of time to focus on gameplay. We expect it toward fall of 2004.



VICTORIA: EMPIRE UNDER THE SUN *Victoria: Empire Under the Sun* will focus on the later stages of the Industrial Revolution, from 1835 to 1920. The diplomatic model will be akin to *Europa Universalis*, with alliances, limited colonial wars, and national prestige. The military side will be more like *Hearts of Iron*, with divisional-size units and tactical decisions playing a major part. This title should be finished near the end of the year.

Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic	Battalion	Q3 2003
Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom	Q4 2003
Aquanox 2	JoWood	Q3 2003
Armed and Dangerous	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII	EA	Sept. 2003
Battlefield Command	Codemasters	Q1 2004
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	2004
Beyond Good and Evil	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Black & White 2	EA	Q2 2004
Call of Duty	Activision	Q4 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q4 2003
Cold Zero	JoWood	Q3 2003
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q4 2003
Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware	Q3 2003
Deus Ex: The Invisible War	Eidos	Q4 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q4 2003
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q3 2003
Driver 3	Atari	Q4 2003
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	2004
Everquest III	Sony	Q4 2003
Evil Genius	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island	EA	Q3 2003
Final Fantasy XI	Sony	Q4 2003
Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Galaxy Andromeda	CDV	Q4 2003
Dungeons & Dragons: Temple of Elemental Evil	Atari	Q4 2003
Ground Control 2	Vivendi	Q3 2003

Guild Wars	NCSoft	Q4 2004
Half-Life 2	Sierra	09/2003
Half-Life Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Q2 2003
Halo	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q3 2003
The Hobbit	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Kohan: Kings of War	Unknown	Unknown
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q3 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Lords of EverQuest	Sony	Q4 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	EA	Q4 2003
Madden NFL 2004	EA	Q3 2003
The Matrix Online	Ubi Soft	Q4 2004
Max Payne 2	Rockstar	Q4 2003
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	Q1 2004
Men of Valor	Vivendi	2004
Middle-earth Online	Vivendi	Unknown
The Movies	Lionhead	Q1 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	Q2 2004
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	June 2003
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2004
Pompeii	CDV	Q1 2004
Pirates of the Caribbean	Bethesda	July 2003
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Railroad Tycoon 3	Gathering	Q3 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003

Return of the King	EA	Q4 2003
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q4 2003
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Savage	Gamez	June 2003
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Shade	Wf Synergy	Q1 2004
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	EA	Q3 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Stalker: Shadow Last	GSC	2004
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Unknown
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
Thief III	Eidos	Q4 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q3 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Atari	Q4 2003
Tribes Vengeance	Sierra	Q4 2004
Trinity	Activision	Q1 2004
Uru 2.0	Disney	Aug. 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Ultima X	EA	Q4 2003
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Q4 2003
Vampire: The Masquerade–Bloodlines	Activision	2004
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	Q3 2003
War of the Ring	Vivendi	Q3 2004
War Times	Strategy First	Q3 2003
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Q2 2004
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

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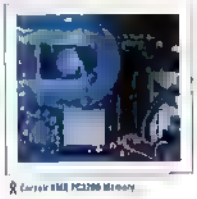

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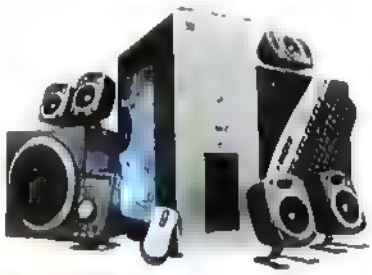

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Bob Tribal shows off the snazzy new (or retro, since *Tribes: Vengeance* is a prequel) chassis.

Two tribesmen trade fashion tips in *Tribes: Vengeance*.

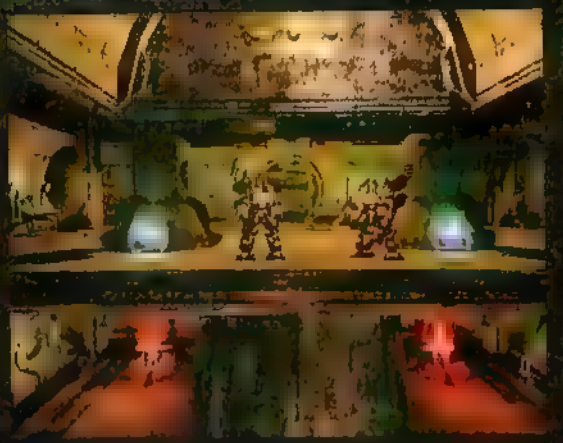
TRIBES: VENGE

Single-player strikes back with, you guessed it, a vengeance By Thierry

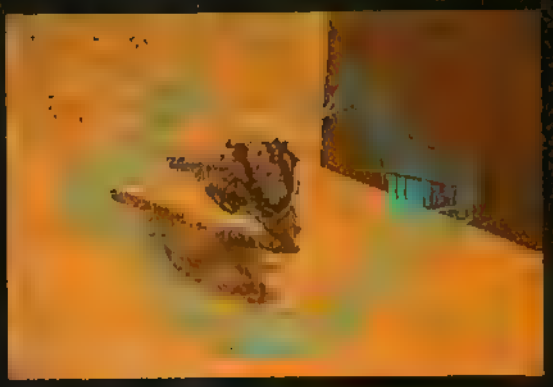
While many players enjoy plugging bullets into Jerry in *Battlefield 1942*, they're unwittingly paying tribute to 1999's *Tribes*. Incorporating both heavy teamplay and easy-to-use vehicles, *Tribes* helped kick-start the whole "cooperative teamplay" dynamic in online multiplayer-action games and introduced slang like "skiing" into the multiplayer-shooter vernacular. The unfortunately early release of *Tribes 2* snatched away goodwill from the fans, and the collapse of Dynamix as a company pretty much put the kibosh on the franchise as a whole. Until now, that is, thanks to *Tribes: Vengeance*.

Since Dynamix is no longer around, *Tribes* will continue with the most surprising of developers: Irrational Games. Being developed in Irrational Canberra (the same studio that worked on *Freedom Force*), *Tribes: Vengeance* will be the first *Tribes* title with a true, single-player component. Where the previous games used single-player as a tutorial only, *Tribes: Vengeance* will have a fully fleshed-out campaign that draws upon a lot of the Starsiege lore seen only in manuals, among other enhancements (such as multiplayer and the current *Unreal* engine).

This Phoenix heavy armor is ready to tear stuff up.



Multiple-level floating bases, missing in *Tribes 2*, are back and better than ever. Really.



There will be a sniper rifle; it just has to undergo careful multiplayer balancing.

THE TRIBE HAS SPOKEN

Slated for release sometime in 2004, *Tribes: Vengeance* features a sprawling and epic tale that echoes the Bible in content and *Pulp Fiction* in storytelling. Without giving away too much, the plot starts with the main character, Julia, wondering what's up with her mom—and then learning more than she bargained for. Set about 300 years prior to the previous games, *Vengeance* should define the *Tribes* universe we've seen in earlier iterations. In another game, we'd scoff at the idea of an "engaging story," but considering that Ken Levine, who crafted the superb stories of both *System Shock 2* and *Freedom Force*, is the scribe for *Tribes: Vengeance*, expectations amplify.

Tribes: Vengeance will also use multiple perspectives to tell the story. An early prototype scenario showed Julia encountering a key character at the end of a mission; the next mission takes place 20 years earlier with the player as a 5-year-old Julia. Other examples include witnessing a character get assassinated and then playing the next chapter as said assassin. You'll likely play a total of five to six characters, with three of them being the central characters.

SECRET TRIBAL RITUALS

Producer Chris Mahnken is being exceptionally coy about specific game details, in light of the fact that *Tribes: Vengeance* is scheduled for a late 2004 release—the game is still in a very early state. "There are going to be jetpacks, skiing, and the disc launcher, but everything else is up for grabs," comments Mahnken. "There will most likely be four vehicles, two air and two ground, but nothing more specific than that right now." Mahnken doesn't want to commit to naming any specific vehicle, only to have it removed in testing.

Despite *Tribes: Vengeance* taking place roughly 300 years before *Tribes*, the weapons and vehicles will still look pretty slick and modern. Mahnken has an actual explanation for why tech looks roughly the same, despite the 300-year gap: *Tribes 1* and *2* featured only the tribes, with no presence of the Empire, and are far, far away from the centers of technology. The tribes are so backwater in the earlier games that everything they have is considered "old, beaten-up crap," à la Tatooine. The perpetually up-to-date Empire possesses such vastly superior technology that for them, 300-year-old tech is roughly equal to weapons from other *Tribes* games.

As for multiplayer, Irrational recently hired Michael "KineticPoet" Johnston, a well-known member of the *Tribes* community, to helm the multiplayer design. Since he created the popular *Team Rabbit 2* mod for *Tribes 2* and knows the community inside and out, die-hard fans should feel relieved that Irrational is planning to hit both single- and multiplayer with full force.

The launch of *Tribes 2* was a major debacle, but with the realistic time frame and the developer behind it, *Tribes: Vengeance* could easily wipe the tarnish off the *Tribes* name.

Tribes: Vengeance features a sprawling and epic story that echoes the Bible in content and *Pulp Fiction* in storytelling.

ANCE

Nguyen

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

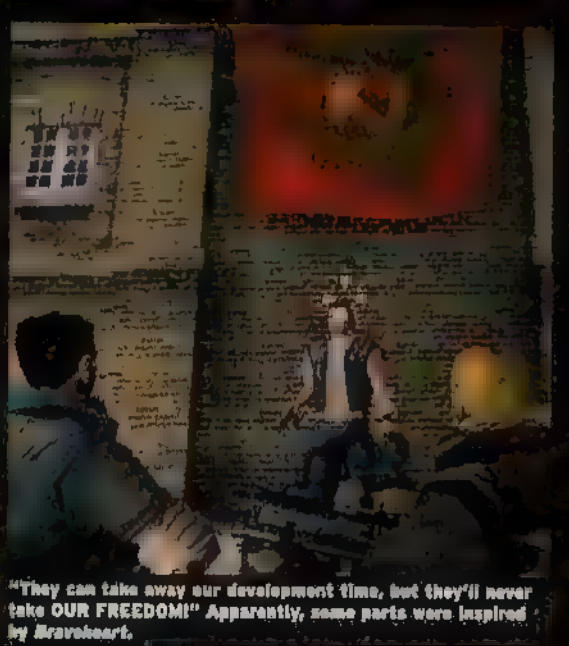
DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL GAMES

GENRE FIRST-PERSON STARSHIP TROOPERS SHOOTER

RELEASE DATE 2004

You can knock out the light and leave bad guys fumbling around in the dark.

There are plenty of things to interact with in the environment, including this turret.



"They can take away our development time, but they'll never take OUR FREEDOM!" Apparently, some parts were inspired by *Braveheart*.

FREEDOM

Patrick Swayze, eat your heart out **By Darren Gladstone**

Forget everything you know about World War II. The Russians, hot to make Communism a household ideology, developed and dropped the first A-bomb. Germany crumbled, Japan gave up, and Europe quickly fell under the boot heel of Stalin. Who is left to stand up to the Red Menace? Not us. America is being invaded in EA's *Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty*. IO Interactive, the creative force behind the *Hitman* series, has been working on *Freedom* for some time now, and all we've got to say is "Viva la revolución!"

Take to the gritty city streets—and rooftops—of New York City.

Unlike *Rogue Spear*, this third-person squad combat game focuses on action.

RISE TO POWER

Not since the Reagan-era classic *Red Dawn* has there been such a jingoistic tale of resisting the Communist menace. In this guerrilla warfare adventure, you're cast as an everyday Joe turned underground soldier. There are 19 levels spanning nine open-environment neighborhoods to explore, and each has miniquests you can solve along the way to your larger goal: liberation.

Tear down a propaganda sign here, raise a flag there—as you begin fighting back, you gain more street cred. Unlike IO's previous games, you're far from alone in gunning for your objectives. Sure, things start off small, but as time moves on (the game takes place during all four seasons in New Moscow—err—New York City), our hero gains charisma and the ability to recruit others to the cause.

The neatest aspect of *Freedom* is the recruiting and commanding of your troops. The open-ended levels will have you rescuing some people and drafting others scattered throughout a war-torn New York City. By the end of the game, you'll have as many as 12 freedom fighters covering your back. Unlike *Rogue Spear*, though, this third-person squad-combat game focuses on action. Point at a location onscreen and you'll be able to quickly issue commands. More important, in a first-hand demo we saw the computer-controlled comrades behaving well under fire.

SMART SOLDIERS

Astute eyes may have caught this game at E3 2002, but there was a lot of work that needed to be done back then—mostly on the A.I., according to assistant product manager Anthony Caiazzo. But now it's starting to look fairly buttoned down. Troops duck for cover, smartly move to proper positions, and even brace against walls and look around corners before advancing. When near turret positions, they do a decent job of holding the line. If only some gamers played this well. Lead designer Mads Prahm also promises plenty of unscripted intelligence driving the Russians. "They will react to how you play, chasing you around corners and into buildings if you run away," says Prahm. When you aren't bossing troops around, *Freedom* supports eight-player multiplayer matches.

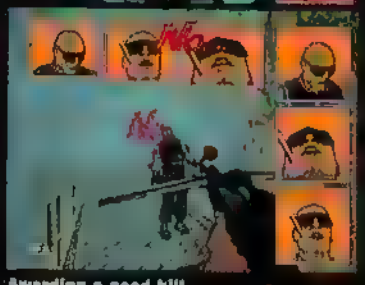
Now that IO has worked out most of the A.I.-related bugs, the focus of development is on graphics, gameplay, and levels. The terrain changes through the course of *Freedom* (as the game progresses, New York City reverts to its pre-Giuliani squalor), and the Glacier graphics engine has been polished to a keen shine at this point. The now prerequisite dynamic lighting, rain, snow, and smoke effects are already in place. Whether shooting out lights down a hallway with a machine gun or lobbing a Molotov cocktail into a car (there will be about 12 weapons in all), what's there looks pretty good.

At press time, the game was only 40 percent complete. Not bad, but IO has an ambitious schedule laid out by Electronic Arts. In order to hit its late fall deadline, the developer needs to blast through the remaining 60 percent of the development process and do some beta testing and bug killing. After consulting former play tester and *CGW* whipping boy, DI Luo, it seems like there's a lot to do in a short amount of time. This means one of three things: 1) the developers will light a fire under their asses and get it done, 2) the release date will be pushed back, or 3) the game will release simultaneously with a 25MB patch. Let's hope for choice No. 1.

"We like the cars, the cars that go BOOM!"

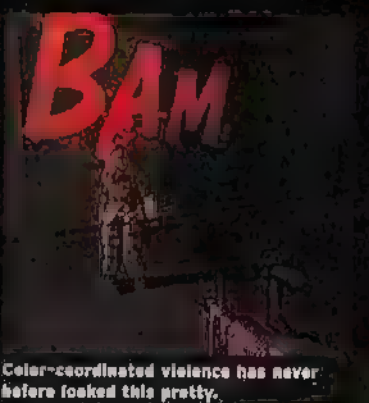
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE
GENRE: SQUAD-BASED ACTION/ADVENTURE
RELEASE DATE: FALL 2003



Awarding a good kill.

You can kill by slinging garbage.



Color-coordinated violence has never before looked this pretty.

XIII

There goes the comic book code

By Di Luo

Amnesia is all the rage these days. Between *The Bourne Identity* and *John Doe*, there's a glut of memory-impaired übermenschen who can kill with their pinky fingers and play a mean Mozart at the same time. Add one more to the pileup. *XIII*, the first-person shooter from Ubi Soft, is looking to fill the amnesia slot in the game market.

A BLANK SLATE

Based on a successful series of Belgian comics, you begin on a deserted beach with nothing but a gunshot wound, a funky XIII tattoo on your neck, a key, and hordes of enemies out to annihilate you. While attempting to clear out the cobwebs, you also happen to be the prime suspect in the assassination of the president of the United States.

We may have seen it all before, but we haven't seen it like this.

Fighting against mysterious terrorists and government organizations, you must try to regain your memory and uncover the truth that lies behind the vast conspiracy.

We may have heard it all before, but we haven't seen it like this. *XIII* is highly stylized and designed to make you feel like you're flipping through the pages of a gory graphic novel. Thanks to gritty cel-shaded graphics and the *Unreal II* engine, there's a surprisingly adult vibe here. (Although after you've lodged a glass shard into someone's head during the game, it isn't as surprising.)

Playing to the comic aesthetic, there are some interesting conventions carried over from the books. There will be the requisite *"BAM!" "BOOM!"* and *"ARRRGH!"* sounds that correspond to the onscreen violence. Gunshots result in fountains of blood, and explosions send bodies flying. Good shots with certain weapons even conjure pop-up comic panels with grisly close-ups of the hit.

The comic-book conventions assist in gameplay as well as in the gruesome visuals. "We wanted to tell a story by using everything used in [comic books]," says associate producer Damien Moret. To illustrate that point, we saw *"tap, tap, tap"* appear onscreen to represent the sound of enemies walking around a corner. Occasionally, you'll even get pop-up panels warning you of impending ambushes and close-ups of key areas you need to visit.

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

XIII's 13 missions (which cover 34 levels) run the gamut of spy-thriller conventions. There will be infiltration missions where your character begins unarmed and intense VIP escort missions where you must fight off dozens of enemies in order to keep your charge safe.

To do the job, you'll have the usual array of weapons and gadgets. There are 13 standard weapons, including crossbows, assault rifles, and rocket launchers, each with an alternative-fire mode. You'll need to choose your weapons and tactics carefully, though, because you can only hang onto four weapons at a time.

And when you run out of bullets, you can improvise with objects: Chairs, bottles, ashtrays, and shards of glass can turn into deadly weapons in your hands. Heck, you can even take your enemies hostage and use them as human shields. "We really want people to interact with the environment in as many ways as possible," says Moret.

The story-driven missions and comic-book feel can easily give you a very memorable single-player experience, no doubt, but it looks like Ubi Soft is putting a good deal of attention into the multiplayer as well. Since this game is coming simultaneously to just about every platform known to man, Ubi Soft is looking to create unique multiplayer modes specific to each platform. What's in store for the PC? Expect the usual Deathmatch and Capture the Flag. No word on what it'll be called, but one of Moret's favorites is a cover me/escort-type mission that has one player running through the level and the other acting as a sniper providing support.

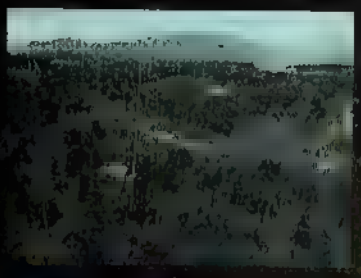
Let me introduce you to my loosetie friend.

Your mission objectives unfold in a comic-book style.

The code we had the pleasure of witnessing was nearing completion, and the developers are now adding the last touches to the various levels before putting the game through the standard testing and balancing routines. If all goes well, we should be able play this unique, stylized game by September.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER UBI SOFT
GENRE FIRST-PERSON
COMIC BOOK
[illegible]



You whippersnappers think you've got it made with all your fancy scooters and Jet Skis. Well, you don't know diddly until you've been on the 6:22 to Wichita! At least PopTop's *Railroad Tycoon 3* hasn't forgotten what that's like.

The first, and most obvious, change to the *Railroad Tycoon* series is that it's now fully 3D. Not only is the game much prettier, but by letting action unfold in a "real" world, PopTop also hopes to make the economics and gameplay more versatile and easier to dig into. Now, budding robber barons can buy industries and place them wherever they want on the map, thereby building 3D towns, instead of just clicking on a station. Industries produce goods on their own, and beginners can choose automatic management of trains, so they don't have to specify cargo. There are some other new twists as well. For instance, if you buy a coal business, you'll get a bonus on fuel costs.

The single-player game will include about 15 scenarios and a separate tutorial. Not satisfied with the campaign to riches? Build custom 1000x1000-mile maps with the included editor, and the 3D world lets you add tunnels, bridges, and the like. Also added is a much-requested Undo feature to edit mistakes. Think it'll require a ton of horsepower to play? Think again. *Railroad Tycoon 3* will run on a mere Pentium II 350 with a 16MB TNT1 card. Of course, all you fancy-pants gamers with newfangled rigs can run the game at up to a 1600x1200 resolution.

Track laying is done essentially the same way as in previous games, but this time, bridges, tunnels, and overpasses (made of stone, wood, or steel) are automatically put in when needed. Gamers can also add up to two sets of double tracks in their stations (up from one) to better manage train traffic. The folks at PopTop say there should be about 45 different locomotives to choose from, with designs from the 1830s to the future, and artistic players will be able to customize skins.

Not only is the 3D game much prettier, but it will make gameplay more versatile.

The strategic map view has a zoom, so you can now view two entities that are close together. A speed control and custom hotkeys let you stay on top of the action, and there's even a feature that lets the camera follow an individual train's route. Improved multitasking lets you do things like buy or sell stock while following a locomotive's progress. Naturally, there's multiplayer competition as well, and as of this writing, it will probably include support for up to eight players. Look forward to riding the rails when *Railroad Tycoon 3* pulls out of the yard this fall.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE

DEVELOPER: POPTOP

RELEASE: NOVEMBER

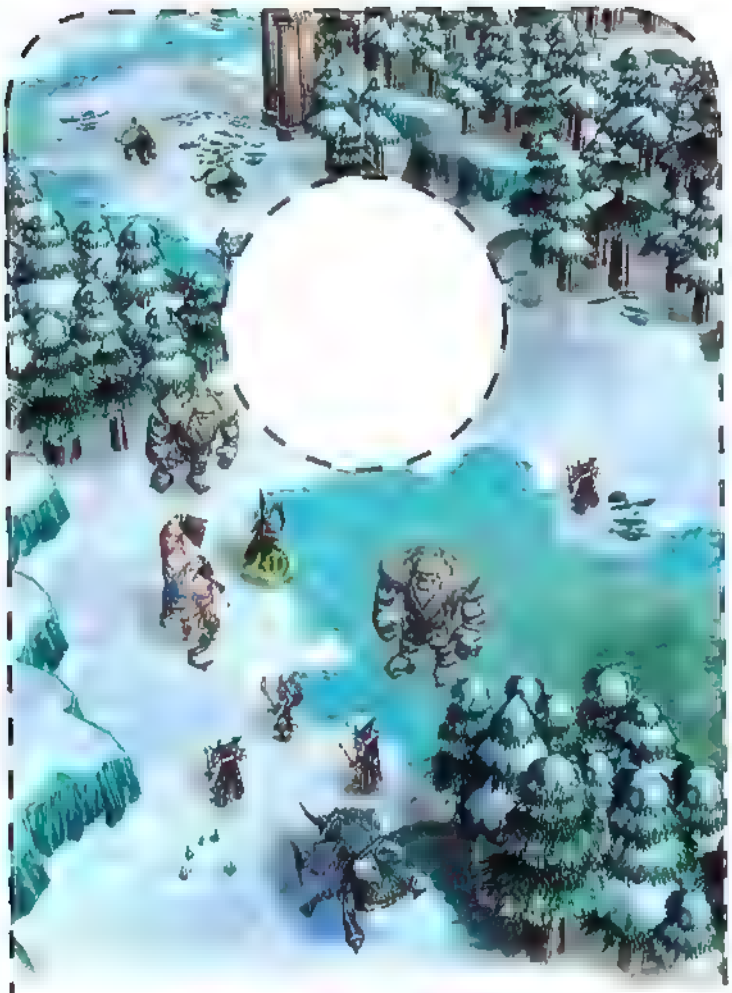
TRAIN SIM

TRAIN SIM: FALL 2000

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

Captains of industry can ride the rails again

By John Marrin



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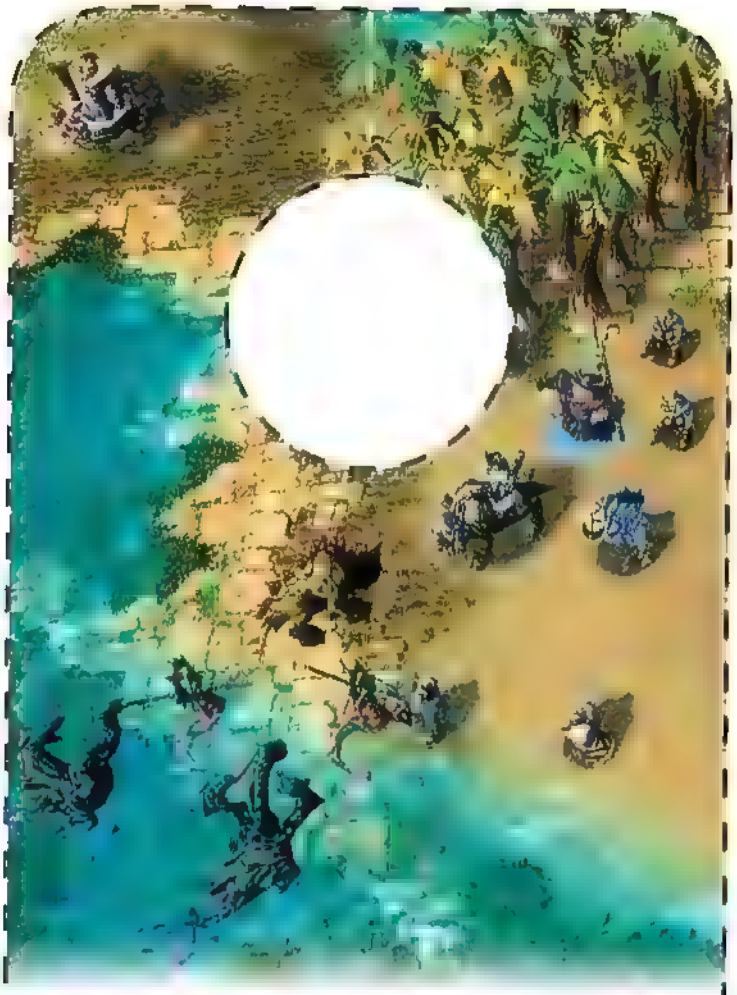

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THE FROZEN THRONE
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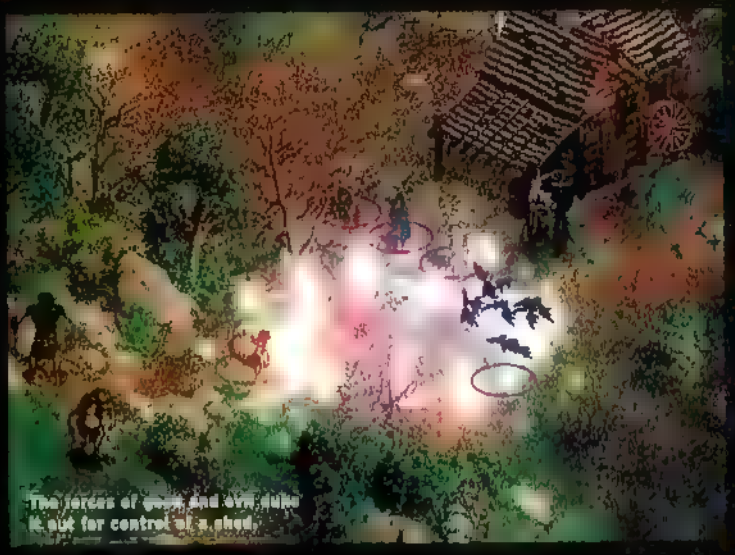
TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence



The forces of good and evil duke it out for control of a shed.

Triumph has been cooking up plenty of new goods in its cauldron.

This is what happens when you leave a cold cup on top of a pile of screenshots instead of a coaster. (OK, it's really a water spell in action.)

AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC

Fantasy empire-building enters new territory

By John Marrin

Wizards are always mucking things up. Even with Michael Jordan on their team they couldn't...oh, sorry—not those Wizards, I mean the ones in Triumph Studios' latest fantasy game, *Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic*. In this latest *Age* installment, mages have caused an imbalance in nature by playing too fast and loose with the natural order. They've used too much magic, and now the Shadow World's nasty denizens threaten to consume all that's good. Naturally, everyone is blaming the magic users for this debacle, and it's up to you to set things right.

New to the series? This turn-based empire-building game has you spread your influence over the map by controlling territory and resources—essentially mana for magic and gold for buying the services of heroes and constructing buildings and other items. Naturally, you have competition, and when you square off against an enemy, the game switches to a tactical battle mode where you pit your fantasy forces against your foe.

In development since the release of *Age II*, the game offers plenty of new goods that Triumph has cooked up in its cauldron. Most notable is a new desert race dubbed the Nomads. Able to relocate cities by packing up and moving out in a caravan, they can help spread your influence. And living off slave trading, these wanderers make for a very unique race that can capture enemy units.

A magic-item forge has also been added. With the forge, gamers can create magical weapons, but the cost is extremely high, making these items quite valuable. In addition, a slew of new units (40 to 50 at the time of this writing) and around 30 new spells have been put into the game for a total of more than 150. That should give even veteran gamers plenty of magic to research. If you'd rather focus on the bigger picture, there's no need to get your hands bloody. Triumph added an Auto-battle mode that quickly resolves conflicts. There's also another added twist: Enemies will surrender if you have an overwhelming force.

Age veterans will find plenty of ways to dig into the game after finishing the single-player campaigns. Whether you're in Skirmish mode or crave eight-way multiplayer matches, you can utilize a number of tweaks to the map generator. First, you pick a game style: Battle Scenario, Epic, or Empire. Next, a slew of options, including settings for terrain, treasure, and number of heroes, let you create just the type of world you want. A new customization feature lets more hardcore creative types import their own artwork to the game, as well as edit all of a unit's individual stats, basically giving the creative gamer a fantasy-strategy construction set to tinker with.

Stay tuned for more updates as we wait for the game's release this coming September.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: TRIUMPH STUDIOS
GENRE: TURN-BASED SPELL-SLINGER
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2003

OUTTA SIGHT

The best games you've never seen

By Scott Steinberg

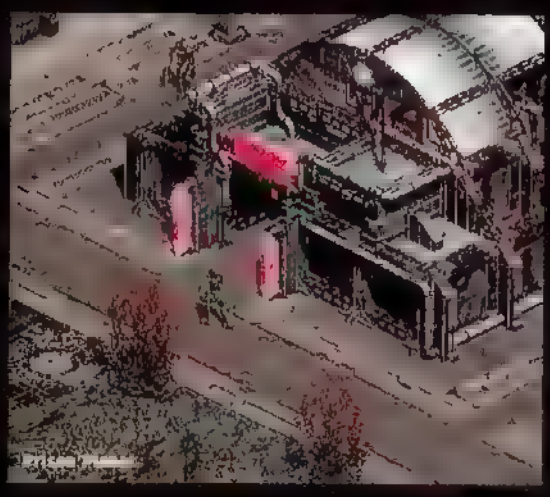
Money can't buy everything, just premium ad placement. So what is undiscovered game development talent supposed to do? Rely on word of mouth alone? Not here, friends. Each month, we'll keep our eyes peeled and ears to the ground, picking the best and brightest titles under production worldwide. Your job is to check out these titles and make the developers so big that they won't return our calls.

SPACE EMPIRES: STARFURY

FROM: SHRAPNEL GAMES
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
AVAILABLE: JULY 2003

SPREAD THE WORD: In the swirling maelstrom of computer gaming trends, few markets remain as staid as the 4X genre. Developer Malfador Machinations knows this; it has struck gold four times over with the cult classic *Space Empires* series. In its latest incarnation, the franchise boldly ventures into unknown territory: an RPG. Rather than control entire galaxies, as in previous installments, interstellar conquistadores command a lone ship, pursing the path of pirate, merchant, or mercenary. Is this the next *Freelancer*?

BEST UNHEARD: In space, no one can hear you squeal with girlish delight. Sold only online in Shrapnel Games' virtual store, the unwashed masses could easily overlook this sweet-looking game. Return customers might not appreciate the change of pace either...look what a sweeping makeover did for *Master of Orion 3*. As the game is still in the beta stage, it's too soon to tell if *Starfury* will wind up rocketing to success or suck like a black hole.



PRIEST

FROM: JC ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: MMORPG
AVAILABLE: JULY 2003

SPREAD THE WORD: H.P. Lovecraft meets *High Noon*—what's not to love about that? Here's the only MMO set in a twisted Wild West scenario, where monsters roam free and scheming archangels threaten heaven's very sanctity. Disgraced priest Ivan Isaacs summons an army of Templar heroes to him. Joining them or the hellish Heretics, you'll fight for sole possession of 12 sacred sites in an ongoing conflict spread across 48 vast environments. Someone remind us—just how many Hail Marys was it for slaughtering an innocent newbie?

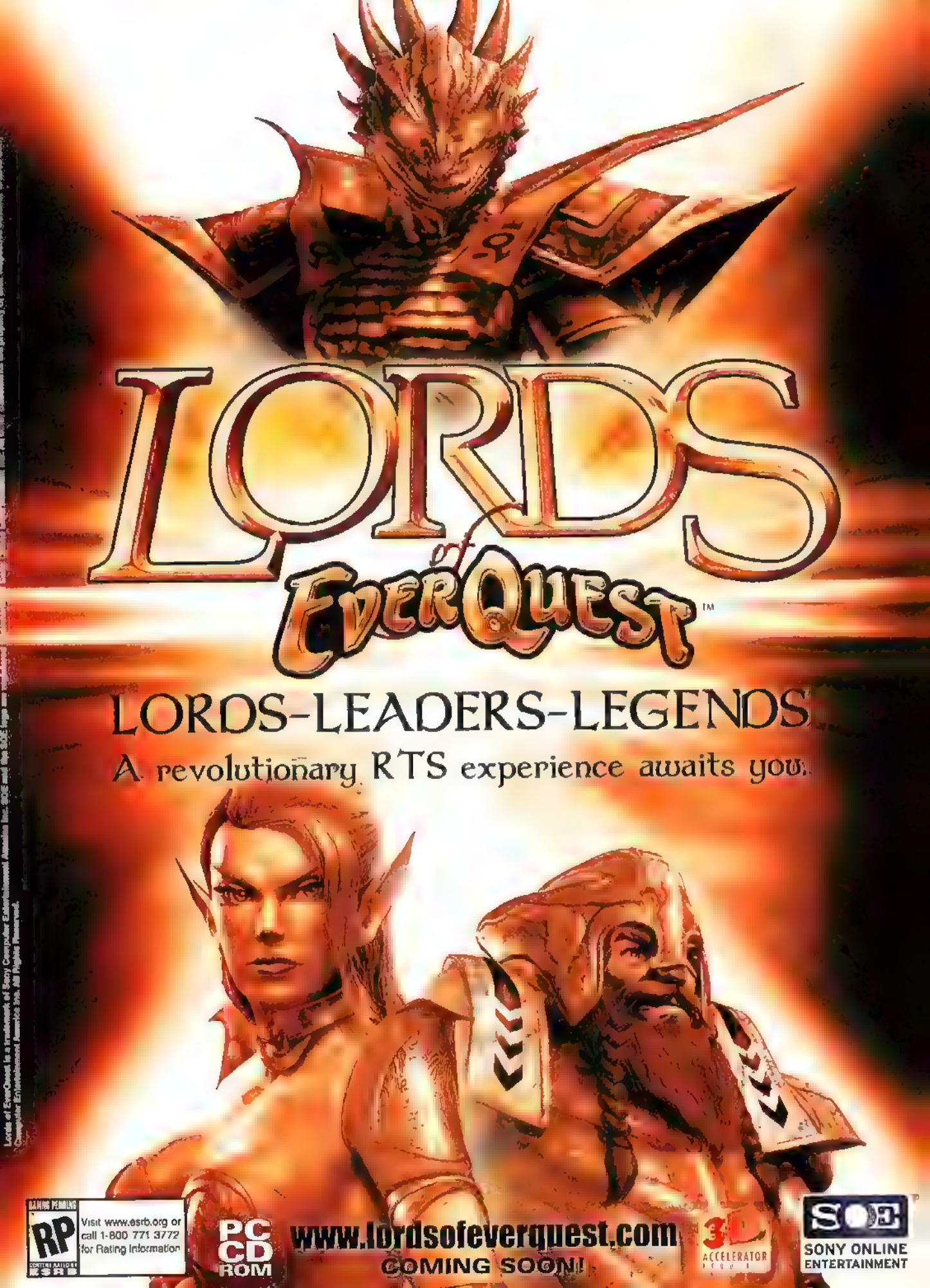
BEST UNHEARD: The Cthulhu mythos hasn't had much luck games-wise. *Shadow of the Comet* bit, and *Dark Corners of the Earth* scored a second chance by the skin of its teeth. Korean publisher JC Entertainment isn't a fan favorite either...at least, we think, since no one in this hemisphere knows who the hell they are. But, given the popularity of the subject matter and the company's track record for successful Asian launches, *Priest* could be a sleeper hit.

PLANET PRISON

FROM: SCHANZ INTERACTIVE
GENRE: STRATEGY
AVAILABLE: CHRISTMAS 2003

SPREAD THE WORD: Ach du lieber! Ze Germans are at it again, crafting yet another intriguing tactical strategy game. As one of two characters who've just crash-landed on a (duh) prison planet, escape is paramount. Controlling several dozen units, you'll explore futuristic locales from a top-down, isometric perspective, doing battle with varying gangs and evil imperialist forces. Simulated social structures actually come into play across 30 levels and 16-player network confrontations, as does a similarly pleasing amount of blaster fire.

BEST UNHEARD: We know what you're thinking, but no—there isn't a shower scene in sight. Graphically, the game resembles *Fallout Tactics* (which means it looks kind of dated), but the chief drawback operating here is inexperience. Both the developer, Numlock Software, and publisher, Schanz Interactive, of the project have little to no track record regarding game development. That isn't to say these guys won't be capable of pulling an ace out of their collective sleeves, but then one never gets a second chance to make a first impression.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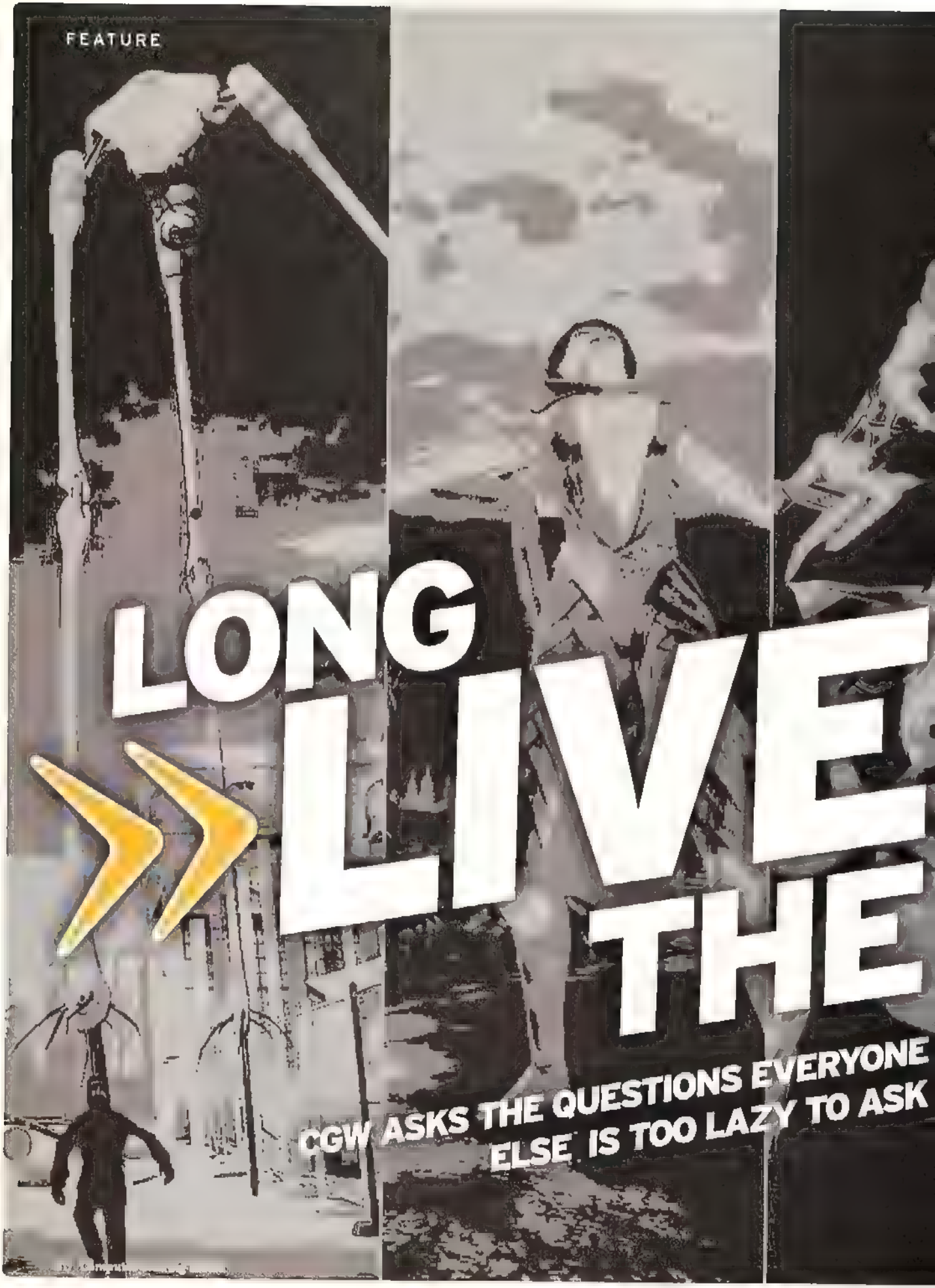
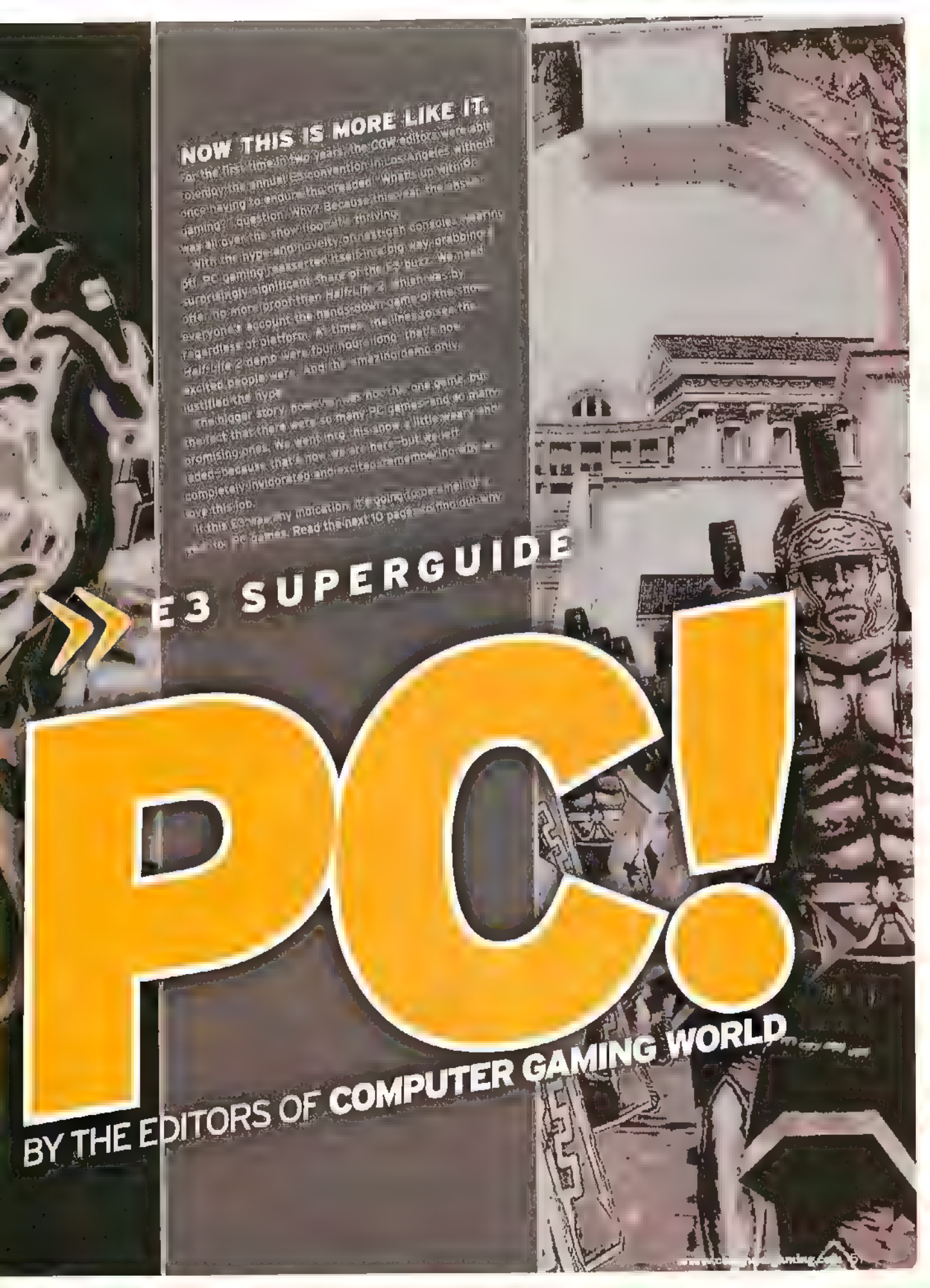


LONG LIVE THE

CGW ASKS THE QUESTIONS EVERYONE ELSE IS TOO LAZY TO ASK



NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.

For the first time in two years, the CGW editors were able to enjoy the annual E3 convention in Los Angeles without once having to endure the dreaded "What's up with PC gaming?" question. Why? Because this year the answer was all over the show floor—it's thriving.

With the hype and novelty of next-gen consoles wearing off, PC gaming reasserted itself in a big way, grabbing a surprisingly significant share of the E3 buzz. We need offer no more proof than Half-Life 2, which was by everyone's account the hands-down game of the show, regardless of platform. At times, the lines to see the Half-Life 2 demo were four hours long; that's how excited people were. And the amazing demo only justified the hype.

The bigger story, however, was not the one game, but the fact that there were so many PC games—and so many promising ones. We went into this show a little weary and jaded—because that's how we are here—but we left completely invigorated and excited, remembering why we love this job.

If this E3 was any indication, it's going to be a hell of a year for PC games. Read the next 10 pages to find out why.

E3 SUPERGUIDE

PC!

BY THE EDITORS OF **COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**

HALF-LIFE 2 OR DOOM III?

THIS IS PRETTY DAMN easy, since we saw a full-blown *Half-Life 2* demo and only a looping trailer of *Doom III*. Since *Half-Life 2* was the one at the show with a presence, it kinda wins the "best PC shooter of E3" question by default. *Doom III* still has an amazing engine with the best lighting around, but *Half-Life 2* totally dominated the show with its use of characters, graphics, physics, and gameplay. Id has a lot to live up to—*Half-Life 2* is pretty much making straightforward shooting galleries irrelevant.

HALF-LIFE 2

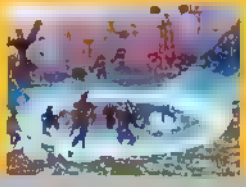
DOOM III

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

OF ALL THE massively multiplayer games we saw at E3, the two that made the biggest impression got our attention because they clip the "massively" off multiplayer and lose the turn-based combat. Microsoft's *Mythica* charges players to be [illegible] in private rooms [illegible] MMORPGs, too much of an OK thing [illegible]

Guild Wars from NCsoft also lets you undertake your [illegible] private battlegrounds and features a unique leveling system. Players acquire skills they can select prior to missions, basically composing an eight-skill deck that [illegible] complements the rest of their party's skills. With support for guild tournaments, missions for 100 plus players, and a monthly fee, *Guild Wars* like *Mythica* is a 2004 release.

10: MYTHICA/GUILD WARS ETA: 2004



RPG AND RTS MIA? WTF?

THANKFULLY, THE DAYS OF EVERYONE AND their great aunt making an RTS are long gone. After all—does mankind really need another *Tribal Rage* or *Dominion*? With few exceptions, the real-time strategy genre was notably unrepresented at E3. In fact, the closest things to big-time traditional RTS titles were add-ons for *WarCraft III* and *Age of Mythology*. *Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age* is OK, but struck us as little more than a tightly focused *Empire Earth*, while *Lords of the Realm III* and *War of the Ring* are just depressing. The one truly bright light is *Kohan*'s sequel. In short, it's looking like the real-time genre is right about where RPGs were a few years back—a bit played out and in need of fresh ideas.

And it looks like RPGs are once again in need of those ideas, at least for lone players. The vast majority of the RPG genre seems to be moving online—*Lineage II*, *Mythica*, *EverQuest II*, and on and on and on. Oh, Bethesda was showing the latest *Morrowind* expansion and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but those two titles alone made up almost half the single-player RPGs shown. *Knights of the Old Republic* looks like a perfectly serviceable RPG, *Temple of Elemental Evil* is impressive, and *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* is just too sad for words. Bottom line: If you're looking to role-play over the next year, be prepared to do it with strangers.

THE RUNNERS-UP

ARMED & DANGEROUS From the minds that brought you *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* comes this messed-up action game. Best new weapon: A corkscrew you drill into the ground and use to flip the entire screen upside down, launching enemies into space.

CITY OF HEROES Finally, a game that lets us wear tights without eliciting puzzled stares from our coworkers. This superhero MMORPG is shaping up nicely, as Cryptic Studios keeps loading the game with tons of cool superpowers and beautiful character and environmental graphics.

DEUS EX: THE INVISIBLE WAR Warren Spector swears he'll fix all the problems of *Deus Ex* with *TIW*. Mum's the word on the story, but everything we've seen—signature Spector gameplay and slick *Unreal*-powered environments—looks good.

EVERQUEST II Sony Online's monster sequel is looking better than ever. The E3 demo, featuring a battle with a humongous red dragon, gave us hope this will be more than just a retread. Let us pray.

FINAL FANTASY XI Sure to cheese off console fans, *FFXI* is coming out for PC first. It looks cool, there's a huge online world to explore, and...well, it's *Final Fantasy*. And you'll be able to play online with PS2 gamers.

HALO PC The closest thing Xbox ever had to a killer app is finally coming to PC and it looks pretty sweet. Gearbox is putting a lot of work into *Halo*'s team-based, vehicle-centric online multiplayer, and we couldn't be happier.

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC It's a Bioware RPG in the *Star Wars* universe. One of the NPCs is a smart-ass assassin droid. What's not to love? It may feel a little too console-y, but it's still good gamin'.

MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM The creators of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* are putting together an intense depiction of the Vietnam war that seems inspired by movies like *Platoon*.

THE MOVIES Peter Molyneux's next game shows lots of promise. We loved the idea of making movie trailers and sending them to friends. Let's hope there's more of that and less of the *RollerCoaster Tycoon*-style stuff they demo'ed.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 Epic relents and gives the people what they want: assault and vehicular combat with hovercraft, flying vehicles, *Halo*-style dune buggies, and more

ANYONE REMEMBER HOW

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL ETA: FALL 2003

MMORPGS: TOO MUCH OF AN OK THING?

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GAMES WERE OUT in strong force at E3—more than 20 titles were shown. While the kinds of games ranged from medieval fantasy (most popular) to superhero to an occult western (*Priest*), there was one notable design trend across the board: story-driven content. Designers hope to achieve this through numerous quests and something many of them referred to as "pocket dungeons."

Pocket dungeons are private areas spawned for individual players or groups. For example, in the superhero game *City of Heroes*, we tried a pocket dungeon mission that took us into a lost city beneath the bustling metropolis. That secret area was created just for our group of spandex-wearing do-gooders—no other players could come in. Many other games, including *World of WarCraft*, *Mythica*, and *Guild Wars*, have similar schemes. Will these kinds of innovations be enough to excite gamers who may view the MMORPG genre as flooded with clones? Probably not, since the basic gameplay doesn't seem to have changed much. We expect many to hang on as niche titles, if they hang on at all.

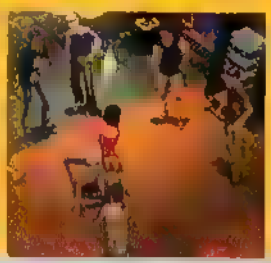
Notable games at E3 included *Mythica* and *Guild Wars* (see Top Ten for more info); *The Matrix Online*, which showed off some cool slow-motion action moves; *Warhammer Online*, with some amazingly detailed character graphics; *Middle-earth Online* (you can be evil and still fight Sauron!); *Horizons*, which promises to be a "crafter's dream"; and *Mu*, a nifty-looking *Diablo* clone from Korea. Most are 2004 titles, so expect bandwidth to be sucked up next year.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

8.

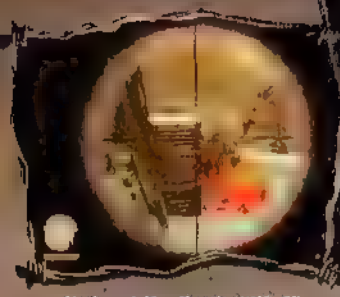
THE SIMS 2 ETA. SPRING 2004

MAXIS IS REVITALIZING



THE GREAT ESCAPE

Shot down behind enemy lines.
A prisoner of the Nazi war machine.
You must guide your band of heroes in the greatest escape in history.



Strike at the Reich with an authentic WWII arsenal.

PlayStation.2 XBOX PC

GOTHAM GAMES

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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WHO'S MAKING MEDAL OF WAR?

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

HERE'S A GAME

XIII ETA: WINTER 2003

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

ARE CROSS-PLATFORM GAMES BAD FOR THE PC?

THIS IS A LOADED QUESTION because cross-platform titles can be both good and bad. On one hand, some titles are coded for the lowest common denominator—that is, if a game comes out on all platforms, you'll often find that the PC version is an afterthought (hello, *007: NightFire*!). When done right, though, it's magical, and you wind up with a great game that looks awesome on a hopped-up PC. Case in point: *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Yes, the PS2 had it more than six months ago, but the PC version looks crisp, and what the hell—if the gameplay ain't broke, don't fix it.

As for the trend progressing upward, we're starting to see some good come of this, thanks to the latest powerhouse platforms. Take Xbox, for example. Since Xbox games are based on the Windows 2K kernel, some serious cross-pollination with the PC only makes sense. Already, titles like *Doom III*, *Counter-Strike*, and *Half-Life 2* are Xbox-bound. With all the good console games we've seen, who's to say that pattern can't work in reverse? For cross-platform games to really work, we need each version to take full advantage of the system it was made for. Hey, Rockstar! If you're listening, how's about a 32-player riot in *Vice City*?

PLEASANT SURPRISES AT E3

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME We'll admit that we almost steered clear of Ubi Soft's booth in hopes of avoiding another *Dragon's Lair 3D*-like debacle. But after girding our collective loins (not a pretty sight, trust us), we got an eyeful of this cool-looking revamp. Is this the heir apparent to Jordan Mechner's classic? That's still to be determined, but this 3D tilt on the original shows serious promise.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL We were hesitant about this, as we really looked forward to Troika's *Arcanum* only to find ourselves with mixed feelings about it. But it looks like Troika both fixed what was wrong with *Arcanum* and preserved and enhanced the mix of *Fallout* and *Dungeons & Dragons*, which puts this game into our Top 10 list.

LINEAGE II *Lineage*, Korea's biggest MMORPG, never really grabbed our attention—but its sequel certainly has. *Lineage II* makes the *Unreal* engine its own, creating a world of towering buildings that features tremendous depth and layering, incredible spell effects, and mind-blowingly beautiful player-controlled dragons. Riding those dragons will be a key part of *Lineage II*'s enormous castle sieges when it ships this winter.

6.

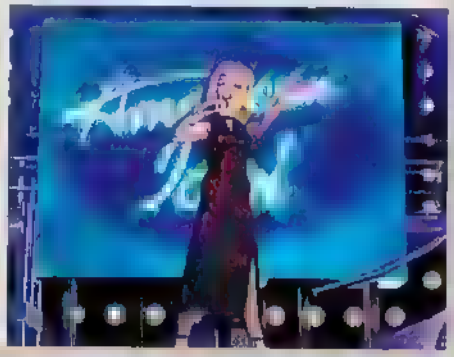
ROME IS GOING to [illegible] Total War [illegible] sweeping scope from its epic real-time battles [illegible] they [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

IS IT ALL ABOUT THE SEQUELS NOW?

PAST E3s HAVE BEEN sequel-driven, but this year's show seemed especially so. At first glance, most games we saw were either direct sequels (we noticed a lot of games with a "2" after the title—and one with a "5," if you can believe that) or re-visits of older franchises. This trend is affecting both PC games and consoles—folks were all aflutter over *Halo 2*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, and even the revised *Pac-Man* game. In years past, we've managed to find a standout new game to proclaim as Game of the Show (such as the original *Halo*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, and even *Republic*), but this year our big titles tended to have numbers after their names. Even the grand guru of PC gaming, Sid Meier, announced *Pirates!* 2, a sequel to a 16-year-old game. Thankfully, there are still some original games to watch—despite this year's sequel-iciousness—and the original constitute more than half of our Top 10 games from the show.

ARE THERE ANY GOOD LICENSED GAMES?

A FEW, FOR YEARS, LICENSED games—games based on other media, like TV shows, movies, or comics—were practically guaranteed to suck. Gamers recognized the games for what they were: cheap, lazy shovelware cynically designed to take fans' dollars without bothering to provide decent gameplay. Those kind of licensed games still exist, for sure (hi, *Farscape*), though more common is the licensed game that tries to be good but still can't rise above the mediocre (hi, *Enter the Matrix*!). This year's E3 was crammed, as usual, with licensed games—*American Idol*, *Buffy*, *Futurama*, *Starsky and Hutch*—that we avoided like the plague. But a notable few that we saw—*Tron 2.0*, *Return of the King*, *Star Wars: Galaxies*—give us hope that a license does not have to equal 'teh suck.' Call us crazy. Call us naive. But if kicking ass as Gandalf turns out to be as cool as it looked at E3, we may eventually forget all about the trauma that was *Survivor*.



TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

THIS IS THE

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Command your own elite squad, be brutal and be feared! Your boys know how to party: with jets, buggies, tanks, APCs and a deadly arsenal, blast the Breed to smithereens!

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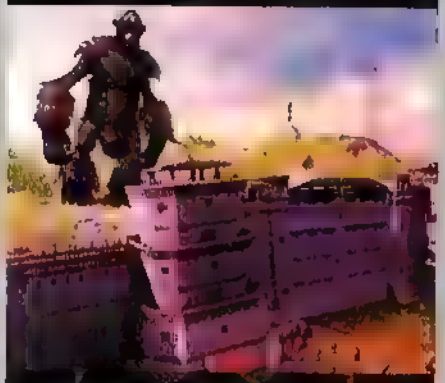
DOES MICROSOFT EVEN MAKE PC GAMES ANYMORE?

THAT DEPENDS ON WHETHER YOU consider *Microsoft Train Simulator 2.0* to be an actual game or an interactive screensaver. OK, that may be a little harsh, but the truth is that this year's E3 featured tons and tons of Microsoft games on Xbox and something less than a handful of titles for the PC—hardly surprising, considering that a highly placed Microsoft staffer admitted to us that Microsoft has no plans to announce any new PC titles before the year's end. Ouch. So what—other than the choo-choos—was Microsoft showing this year? A trailer for the sequel to *Dungeon Siege*, a new *Flight Simulator*, the *Rise of the Titans* expansion for *Age of Mythology*, the Xbox port *Halo*, and—the only truly new title—the MMORPG *Mythica*. None of these titles was godawful—*Mythica* looks promising and the graphically upgraded *Halo* appears to have absolutely killer multiplayer—but compared to recent history, it's hard not to conclude that the giant from Redmond is throwing all of its resources behind its console and leaving the PC behind. Only time will tell if this refocusing is a permanent thing.

GAMES WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

LORDS OF THE REALM III Giddy anticipation rapidly became bitter letdown when we saw the latest incarnation of this storied series. By going fully 3D, completely real-time, and really focusing on multiplayer, *Lords* has seemingly abandoned everything that made us love this game, and has instead become a pallid *Total War* clone.



BLACK & WHITE 2 Maybe we're overcompensating for our *Black & White* review, but we're not sure whether the sequel can redeem the original. Graphically, the game looks great, and Lionhead will make creatures smarter and easier to train. But adding *Age of Empires*-style city-building and armies could make the game unwieldy or unfocused.

FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS Maybe it's because it was running on a PS2. Or maybe it's because it was a too-short demo in a too-loud room at E3. Whatever the reason, we walked away a bit worried about this one because it looked far more action-oriented than we expected. Stay tuned, though. We could be totally wrong—and we hope we are.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

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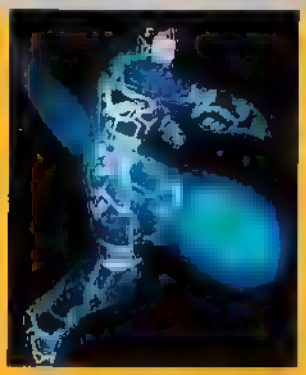

TRON 2.0 ETA: AUGUST 26, 2003

OK, SO JUST because we got an autographed photo of Bruce Boxleitner at E doesn't mean we're biased. We still thought this game rocked. Monolith's 21st century update of the 1982 movie is looking wilder and more fun than ever. What seemed like a horrible idea a year ago has now manifested as one of the most original, startling looking shooters we've ever seen. Running counter to every other game's focus on realism," *Tron*'s deliberately artificial game world set inside a fantasy digital universe is a beauty to behold. And Monolith, the creator of such outstanding shooters as *NOLF* and *Aliens vs. Predator*, knows its gameplay, too. We can't wait

WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THESE FOREIGNERS?

IT USED TO BE THAT the majority of good PC games came from American developers. Now, we're seeing development houses all over the world bring in top-notch titles for the PC. Why is that? Well, while the big boys statesside are looking to make games for consoles, foreign developers with a PC in the basement and a dream are putting together some fantastic stuff. Where do you think last year's hit, *Battlefield 1942*, came from?

We risked the tiny booths scattered around [illegible] and came away with a look at some very cool—and very promising—[illegible] from those dang furr[illegible]. Take GSC's [illegible] *Oblivion Lost*. We've [illegible] eye on this [illegible] for [illegible] while, and befo[illegible] start of E3, [illegible] announced it was [illegible] up the No[illegible] American rights. [illegible] we were [illegible] something ther[illegible] ther nod to [illegible] underdoos. Y[illegible] not hearing [illegible] talk [illegible] Encore's C[illegible]ero, Tri Syner[illegible] *UFO Aftermath* or stuff from th[illegible] Korean continent (UC Entertainment's *Call of Cthulhu*-inspired horror/western MMORPG *Priest* and NCsoft's *Guild Wars*)—but you should.

[illegible] OBLIVION LOST

KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS [illegible]

KOHAN: KINGS OF WAR ETA 2004

SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT PORTABLE GAMING?

AFTER THIS YEAR'S SHOWING AT E3, we'd have to say "Hell yes!" Though maybe someone should ask Jeff again, since he's too busy playing *Pokémon Sapphire* on his GBA SP. Sprint PCS is quick to show how dedicated it is to pushing the gaming segment for its users. Sanyo's 8100 is the current cream of the crop, doing a pretty tight job on graphics and games. Even cooler still is what's on the horizon: Samsung's SPH-A600, which will let you flip the LCD screen over on itself and dock the phone in a mini gamepad, so it handles like a GBA. Sprint's game selection looks promising but is still best suited for less taxing titles—we played friggin' *Deer Hunter 3D* (it wasn't) and *Ms. Pac-Man*.

Nokia is trying to explode in the cell phone-gaming space with the N-Gage—a chunky, funky cell phone that'll play games, MP3s, and even radio when you're not chewing up talk-time. It'll sell on October 7 to the tune of $300 with 10 launch titles. Are you ready to spend that kind of money? We're not. This ambitious cellie strives to be more than a phone, but while the games we knocked around—such as *Tomb Raider*—looked OK, we've seen better.

That kind of dough for a souped-up cell phone may seem excessive, but that's cheap for a powerful PDA. Enter Tapwave. This tiny company showed off the Helix (tentative codename) behind closed doors and impressed the hell out of us. This thing boasts more features than we have room to go on about here, including a 3.8-inch LCD with 480x320 resolution, ATI 2D graphics chip, Fathammer's 3D software engine, two SD card slots, and IR and Bluetooth support. Tapwave has already signed on Activision, Atari, and Midway to make Helix-specific games. And let's not forget that this is also a fully functional Palm OS 5 PDA, able to juggle contacts, play MP3s, and show crisp video at 40 frames per second!

Sony threw down the gauntlet by announcing a portable PlayStation (PSP, for short), which the company is touting as the Walkman for the 21st century. Still more than a year away, it's an interesting notion: PS1-caliber games on a tiny handheld. No prices cited, no games announced—there wasn't even a prototype device to show off! Still, Sony promises extensive support from the likes of Electronic Arts, a built-in memory stick slot (for digital audio), and an optical drive that'll play tiny 1.8GB discs. We wonder how much juice the disk drive and LCD will eat up—and if we can wait until the official release in fall 2004.

So, what is the venerable GBA doing in light of all this competition? Nintendo is trying to bolster all its GameCube games with GBA support (some cool *Pac-Man* and *Link* adventures are in store), but after the announcement of Sony's PSP, Nintendo's stock has dipped lower than Mario's mustache.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

2.

A ONE-LINE DESCRIPTION could read *'Dungeon Keeper meet*

EVIL GENIUS

ETA: SUMMER 2004

HALF-LIFE 2

ETA. SEPTEMBER 30 2003

GEE, WHAT A SURPRISE: [illegible]

If you bought all these games, it would cost about **$186.**

Why not try them all first in the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine for less than $10?

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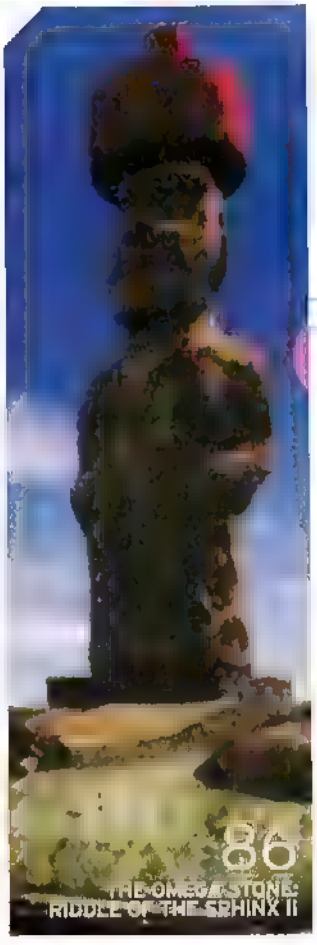
PlayStation

Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

Each time the game calls for some derring-do, a cut-scene kicks in and the derring gets done without input from you.

ENTER THE MATRIX 84



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Rise of Nations

Another good RTS

BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER BIG HUGE GAMES
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN: BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE $49.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 500MHZ, 128MB RAM, 800MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 800MHZ, [illegible] RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

It has been more than a decade since the first PC RTS was developed and the genre has evolved quite a bit since the days of *Dune II*. Instead of three sides, you now have dozens. Instead of plain 2D graphics, you now have magnificent 3D. Despite the changes, the basic concept remains the same: harvest, build, research, and conquer. *Rise of Nations*, like the latest crop of big-budget RTS titles, continues this tradition of "evolution not revolution" and successfully adds new wrinkles and intricacies to an oversaturated genre. And like its brethren, it is good—but without being amazing or breathtakingly original.

Real-time Civ

The developer behind *Rise of Nations* is best known for his work on turn-based games. Brian Reynolds was the chief designer for *Civilization II* and *Alpha Centauri* while working with the legendary Sid Meier. *RON* is his first release since leaving Firaxis to form his own studio, Big Huge Games. Reynolds borrows unabashedly from his turn-based past, and *RON* is so full of concepts from his previous games that it is probably the most complicated and involved game in the genre.

Gameplay revolves around the building and control of cities. Many structures, such as libraries and granaries, must be built inside your city's radius, and the loss of your capital means automatic defeat unless you take it back within an allotted time. Cities also extend a national border, which affects where you can build and the amount of taxes you can collect; it can even cause attrition damage to enemy units when they invade your territory.

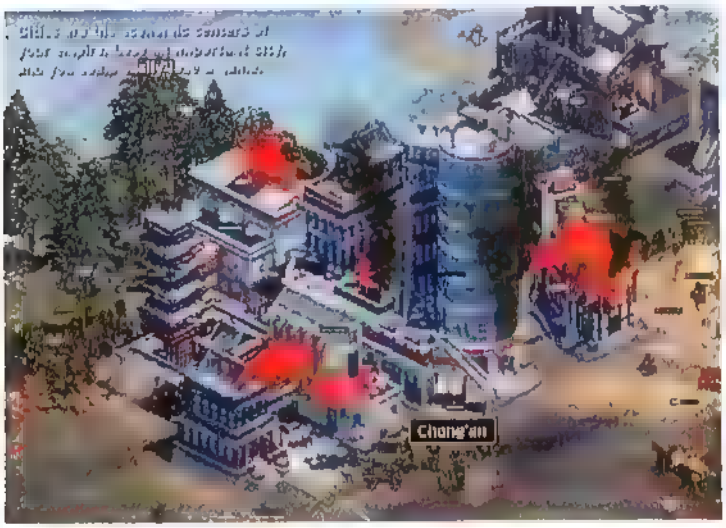
Just the addition of the borders would have made *RON* stand out in the genre, but the list of new complications is breathtakingly long. There are 18 distinct civilizations, a huge tech tree that spans eight different ages, spies, commandos, generals, supply wagons to counter attrition, and trade routes. Add to this a global resource market reflecting supply and demand, wonders giving concrete benefits to your civilization, and six different resources to harvest. The list goes on, and *RON* at times seems to be an exercise in seeing how many different strategy gaming conventions the designers could cram into one little package. While many of these aspects work for a turn-based game like *Civilization*, in hectic real-time, it can become quite overwhelming.

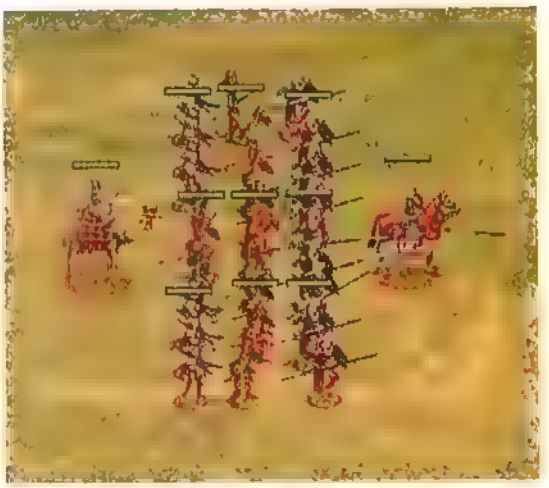
Too much of a good thing?

Big Huge Games must be given credit for making improvements in the economic game. While there are many resources to manage, the peasants are highly automated and will generally be smart enough to gather resources or build structures on their own if left idle. Resource-gathering structures, such as mines and farms, never run out of supply, so you won't need to scramble to find virgin forests or another gold mine. There is also a global market where you can purchase or sell the primary resources of food, oil, wood, and metal. If the world supply is abundant, prices will be low, but if everyone's trying to grab the

A combined-arms army turning the opposition into dust.

Fighting over oceans is essential as resource collection at sea can be more efficient.




Units in *RON* can march in pretty little formations and combat will take flanks and terrain into account.

resource, the price gouging would make OPEC envious.

Other than dispensing with the cumbersome use of troop transports over bodies of water, *RON*'s combat model is also more complicated than those in most conventional RTS games. Units attacked on the flanks and rear or while crossing a river receive extra damage. There's a rock-paper-scissors factor in how various units match up—which might change depending on the tech level of the forces—and a general can do things like entrench his forces or even create decoys to fool the enemy. Throw in attrition, supply, spies, and commandos into the mix, and you'll probably need four hands and eight eyes to manage everything properly at normal speed settings. The attrition was a nice touch, but the other stuff is mostly window dressing for people lacking the aforementioned appendages.

Also breaking the mold of the genre is the single player campaign, which eschews the story-driven campaign in favor of a *Risk*-style map. You begin with one province and must lead your civilization to global domination before the game advances past the Information Age. As you conquer territories, you gain special resources and bonus cards that grant benefits in battle. It's no *Medieval: Total War*, but it's serviceable and interesting enough to warrant a play through.

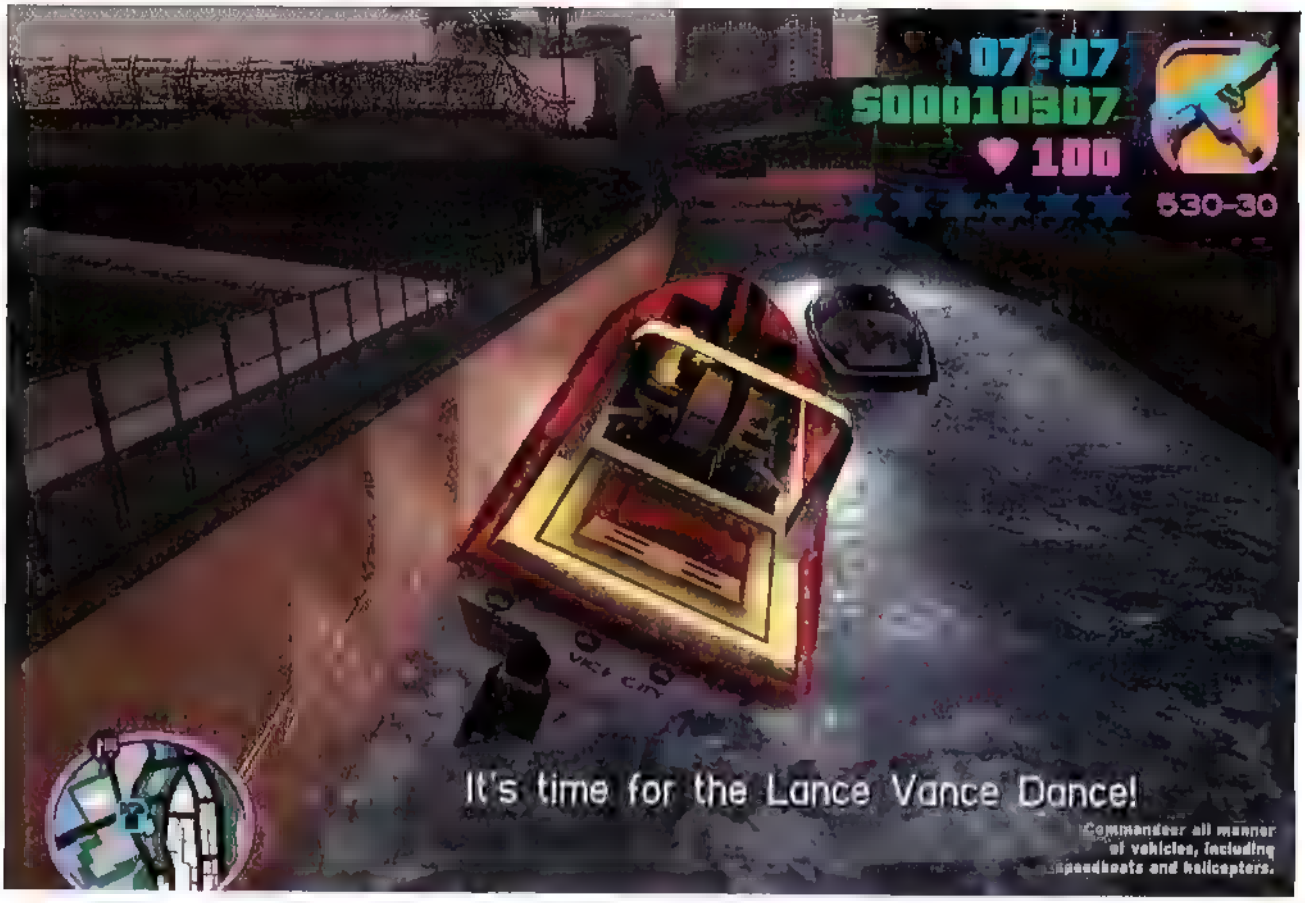
At times, *Rise of Nations* seems to be an exercise in seeing how many different strategy gaming conventions the designers could cram into one little package.

Like any good RTS, *RON* shines in multiplayer mode. With a large selection of nations, game styles, and maps, it offers a lot of bang for your buck. All the new game concepts allow for varied styles of play and help keep the experience fresh in each game. Unfortunately, connections over GameSpy are a bit iffy at launch time, and getting a full game of eight players can feel like a day in the life of Tantalus.

Though newbies probably shouldn't touch this game with a 10-foot pole, *RON* is worth the price of admission for die hard RTS fans. It seems to offer more of the same, but it does it better and bigger than most. There has been enough added to keep even the most jaded players playing. It will certainly wrest the title of "the last great RTS" away from *Age of Mythology*, but in the end, it's still just another RTS.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Bigger and better, but feels almost like an expansion pack to the last generation of RTS.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Hauling ass, Hall and Oates, and a hail of bullets

BY RON DULIN

EDITOR'S CHOICE
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH
GENRE ACTION
ESRB RATING MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE, STRONG LANGUAGE, STRONG SEXUAL CONTENT, VIOLENCE
PRICE $49.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 800MHZ, 128MB RAM, 915MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4, 256MB RAM, 1.55GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Grand Theft Auto III was a big surprise. Its predecessors were silly and simple top-down racing games with a crime-spree twist. So it was shocking when Rockstar applied the series' basic formula to a three-dimensional world and ended up with one of the most exciting, and arguably best, games in recent memory. *Grand Theft Auto III* received a great deal of attention due to its amoral gameplay, but what was overlooked in all the hot air and hand wringing was the fact that the game itself was revolutionary, giving you unprecedented freedom to go almost anywhere and do almost anything in a huge virtual city.

The game doesn't look great, but at higher resolutions, you won't even notice.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City doesn't alter the substance much, but it does give the game a stylistic overhaul.

The big change is the setting. Gone are the modern-day, gritty streets of Liberty City. *Vice City* is set in the 1980s, in a town that looks like a made-for-cable version of Miami, with sockless men in pastel blazers shooting it out amidst palm trees and neon lit strip clubs. The vehicles, including flashy speedboats and renamed Ferraris and DeLoreans, evoke the era, but nothing seals the deal like the soundtrack. The licensed songs may make you miss the parody music from *Grand Theft Auto III*, but the music selection is both large and varied, running from Latin jazz to new wave to hair metal. And an argument can be made that songs like Cutting Crew's "(I Just) Died in Your Arms Tonight" and Autograph's "Turn up the Radio" are funny enough on their own.

Simulating neon-lit murder

Apart from the setting, however, the basic formula remains intact. You perform tasks for competing crime lords, stealing vehicles, killing thugs, and trying to stay away from—or just sever an artery on—the long arm of the law. The missions rarely get repetitive, and the variety is one of the game's strengths. There are boat races that end in shootouts with helicopters, drug deals that end in timed bolts across the whole of *Vice City*, and tank heists that end with a battalion of soldiers chasing you through the streets. Almost every mission requires you to perform several tasks, and on the whole, the missions are much more interesting than those in *Grand Theft Auto III*.

You'll get most of your missions as you follow the story line, which involves a cocaine deal that went bad for both parties, and the protagonist's attempt to make things right with his bosses. But, as in *Grand Theft Auto III*, you can create a crime spree of your own without even visiting any of the major characters. You can steal cabs and pick up fares, steal ambulances and deliver patients to the hospital, or you can just

Roadblocks are only a problem if you aren't driving fast enough.

The dozens of available cars all have unique handling.

You can earn money by selling "treats" to junkies.

Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to.

rampage through the streets and see how long you can survive with the police, the FBI, and the army on your tail. *Vice City* also allows you to purchase buildings, such as dance clubs and apartment buildings, that provide additional save points and, later in the game, can provide you with income.

Handles much better than your jalopy

While the majority of the scripted missions are great, there are a few clunkers that are notably frustrating including a mission in which you must guide a radio-controlled helicopter and plant some bombs at a construction site. The PC-specific control scheme is not suited for the task, and as such, it will likely take you numerous tries just to figure out how to operate the thing. But this problem is the result of one of the game's strongest features. The controls have been completely redesigned for the PC, and running around on foot uses the standard WASD keys and the mouse. Though it seems like a simple change, it makes *Vice City* not only an excellent console-to-PC translation, but also the rare port that is actually better than the original.

Vice City was obviously an expensive production, and the money shows in more places than a Michael Jackson song on the radio. The characters' voices are provided by actors such as perennial psycho Ray Liotta, independent film staple Luis Guzman, and no-descript-on-necessary Burt Reynolds. More important, though, the characters themselves are distinct and funny, and the dialogue is great. The game may rely on toilet humor much of the time, but it is undeniably funny toilet humor. And the occasional subtle moment shows that there's an intelligence at work behind the ass jokes, like when a host on Vice City Public Radio announces that the station is for "teachers and librarians."

As a sequel, *Vice City* doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. The minor improvements—such as better missions and the addition of motorcycles—are enough to make the game worthwhile for anyone whose moral barometer can handle a game in which mass destruction and murderous rampages are not only encouraged, but also required.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A minor overhaul for one of the best games in recent memory.

Day of Defeat

A two-year-old mod holds its own against BF1942

BY JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER VALVE SOFTWARE
GENRE SQUAD-BASED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
ESRB RATING TEEN
PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS
PENTIUM III 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS
PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT
THAT'S ALL THERE IS, BABY

Is there really any argument, at this point, whether *Half-Life* was the best PC game of the past 20 years? If so, just consider this. Not only is *Half-Life* itself a certifiable masterpiece, yet to be equaled by any competitor five years after its release, but the tools released with the game have allowed users to create free mods that, in some cases, have become classics in their own right. Exhibit A, of course, is *Counter-Strike*, a squad-based multiplayer mod that has ruled the online world for years now, and is the only amateur game to reside in *CGW*'s Hall of Fame.

Now we have Exhibit B: *Day of Defeat*, another squad-based multiplayer mod, set in WWII, which further solidifies *Half-Life*'s amazing legacy. Like *Counter-Strike*, *Day of Defeat* has actually been around awhile (since January 2001) as a free download, but it became so popular that Valve Software wisely "adopted" the game and added new content; the company has now released *Day of Defeat* as a retail product. The result is a pretty great game, easily recommendable, that, though it suffers in some ways due to its age, holds up surprisingly well, even in comparison to newer, awesome titles like *Battlefield 1942*.

Set in the European theater in 1944, *Day of Defeat* pits two squads (Axis versus Allies) against each other over 15 different multiplayer maps—10 of which were created for this retail version. In contrast to *Battlefield 1942*, *Day of Defeat* is strictly infantry-based—there are no vehicles or air units whatsoever—and the map designs reflect this difference. While *Battlefield 1942* features huge, open environments, the *Day of Defeat* maps tend to be smaller, narrower, and more claustrophobic in feel, with a generous, clever, well-planned collection of tunnels, crawl spaces, ledges, and nooks and crannies to skulk around and (though I would never do this) camp. The maps are small enough for newbies to comprehend, but complex enough to require multiple sessions to discover how to best plot your moves and strategies. The retail version's new minimap, which can toggle to a near-full-screen display, further eases the newbie pain clearly marking routes and dynamically marking the location of friendly units.

It's all about lurking—*Day of Defeat*'s claustrophobic maps encourage stealth. No, we didn't say "camping."

Day of Defeat makes up for the lack of vehicles with a couple neat tricks of its own.

While the lack of vehicles may bum out *Battlefield* veterans, *Day of Defeat* makes up for it, somewhat, with a couple neat tricks of its own. Best of all is the weapon-handling, which really takes some practice to master. The recoil on some of the weapons is brutal, making it nearly impossible to fire a decent shot while moving. You can avoid this by setting your weapon on a bipod, but the setup incurs a serious delay—and you must remain stationary while firing. (Using the scope on the sniper rifle incurs a similar delay.) *Day of Defeat*'s respawn system is much friendlier than *Battlefield*'s, penalizing you with, at most, a 10-second delay before thrusting you back in the action. For those who die often, like me, it's a serious reduction in frustrating down-time.

Day of Defeat's biggest problem is simply the fact that it's based on a now-aging engine. The textures and objects can't help but look dated and jaggy, and some of the animations really just don't cut it anymore. On the other hand, the newly redone character models are quite detailed, and the sound, with whizzing bullets and explosions adding real tension, is fantastic.

Day of Defeat is not going to stop the juggernaut that is *Battlefield 1942*, but it does get props for being here first, and for ably holding its own against the newer game. Shooter fans with less-than-state-of-the-art systems could do a lot worse.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Day of Defeat is a great squad-based game mod marred only by its age.

Bandits: Phoenix Rising

Forget Mad Max...we've got Furious Fennec

BY ROB SMOLKA

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER TM SYNERGY, INC.
DEVELOPER GRIN GORE ACTION
ESRB RATING TEEN: VIOLENCE
PRICE $19.99 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700, 256MB RAM, GEFORCE3 OR EQUAL 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Stop me if any of this sounds familiar: Earth is a barren wasteland with very limited resources. Groups of bandits driving *heavily* armed vehicles made of spare parts battle over what little is left after a global catastrophe. One of the characters is a thick-brogued Scot who says "crrrap" a lot. There's also a powerful doomsday weapon called the Phoenix that everyone would love to get their hands on, and it's hidden within the walled city of Jericho. All we're missing is Tina Turner in chain mail wailing that she doesn't need another hero.

None of this is too problematic if the gameplay is exciting—and *Bandits* comes through in spades. The two characters—Fennec and Rewdalf (a Scottish midget)—whose car you control are quite funny and add a lot of charm to the proceedings with their banter. The 20 or so missions, while not terribly innovative, are nicely varied and give you plenty of opportunities to test out the awesome physics engine and the large selection of weapons you'll get to add to your vehicle. *Bandits* is also easy on the eyes, with great detail in the cars and enough special effects to make Hollywood jealous.

Combat is one of the game's strongest features. Even though *Bandits* supports both steering wheels and joystick controllers, you're going to want to play it like you would a first-person shooter—using the keyboard and the mouse. Being able to fire the mounted turret independent of the direction the car is moving is a welcome improvement over the typical turn-in-circles monotony of other vehicular combat games. You'll need to master this method, too, as the enemy A.I. on all three difficulty levels will make you pay if you're not up to snuff. The in-game music covers a wide variety of styles and all fit the action beautifully. There is also a decent selection of multiplayer maps for when you have a hankering to blast your buddies via a LAN or fight complete strangers over the Internet.

You'll want to play *Bandits* like you would a first-person shooter—using the keyboard and the mouse.

Since the game is fun, I'm willing to overlook the story elements that *Bandits* "borrows." I can also forgive the fact that at times it's just too damn hard, even at the lowest difficulty level. For $20, though, you get a lot of bang for your buck.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A fun first-person shooter dressed up in a third-person racing game's clothes.

North Africa, 1942:
French soldiers
scorched Axis troops
with blistering
flamethrower assaults.

This Fall,
it's your turn.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

Loses both substance and style on the PC

BY CHE CHOU

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER KCEJ GAME
MULLETED STEALTH ACTION
ESRB RATING MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE, PARTIAL NUDITY, VIOLENCE PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM, 4GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4 1.2GHZ, 256MB RAM, 7GB HARD DRIVE SPACE MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Terrorism. Rogue nations. Nuclear war. These were urgent themes that dominated *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*, 2001's stealth-action blockbuster on PS2. While the game's topical elements persist, *MGS2*, which arrives on the PC in the form of a bonus laden director's cut, feels outdated two years down the line. The problem here isn't so much with the game's content, which remains as ambitious and poignant as ever, but rather with Konami's sloppy porting efforts to the PC and the two-years-too-late release date.

Taking place a short while after the events of *Metal Gear Solid*, part deux opens with returning covert-ops roughneck Solid Snake investigating rumors of a new type of Metal Gear, a bipedal tank capable of launching nuclear strikes with little preparation. And what an opening it is! Producer/director Hideo Kojima combines Hollywood's action-movie tradition with the stylistic flair of Japanese animation for an epic bungee-jumping sequence off the George Washington Bridge onto an unsuspecting oil tanker. The event is a breathtaking one-of-a-kind experience rarely seen in PC games, setting up nicely for an excursion into *MGS2*'s narrative-driven stealth-action gameplay.

Similar to titles like *Thief* or *Splinter Cell*, *MGS2* encourages players to keep out of sight. To that end, the game gives you plenty of ways to stay stealthy and deadly. Solid Snake has the ability to punch, kick, choke, shoot, and tranquilize (in first person perspective no less) his enemies, as well as the option to hang from banisters and hide under boxes, within lockers, and under tables should such situations arise. And even while the gameplay, with its slightly lethargic A.I. and simplistic cat-and-mouse routines, does nothing in the way of realism, *MGS2* is nonetheless an exceedingly deep game worth exploring—once you learn its rules. Having mastered its philosophy, you can challenge your skills in *MGS2*'s many story-free VR training missions that boil the game down to its purest form.

If you're stupid enough to wander in front of a projector, everyone in the room will notice you.

The VR missions provide some narrative-free missions that focus on pure stealth gameplay.

That said, much of *MGS2*'s excellent playability has been mangled by the game's terrible transition to the PC. For starters, this game begs for a game pad controller of some sort (I used a Microsoft Sidewinder). Even with a console-like controller in hand, however, *MGS2*'s default button layout makes for an awkward (or even unplayable) experience. To make matters worse, much of *MGS2*'s controls were optimized for PS2's Dual Shock 2 controller—which features eight analog buttons and two analog sticks. Without the use of analog buttons, simple actions like putting your gun away (by slowly lifting your finger off the trigger button) or gradually leaning around corners are obliterated, making the game clumsy and difficult.

Underneath the shoddy user interface and disappointingly high system requirements (in resolutions higher than 800x600, expect to see lots of slowdown) is a bold game that needs to be experienced. The question is, should you play *MGS2* on a PC? Well, not if you can help it.

The problem here isn't so much with the game's content, which remains as ambitious and poignant as ever, but rather with Konami's sloppy porting efforts to the PC.

Lockers are handy to stuff corpses into.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

This is supposed to be MGS2: The Director's Cut, but the sloppy port makes this more like MGS2: The Chimp Next Door's Cut.

Port Royale

It's Pirates! with cheese BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ASCARON
DEVELOPER: ASCARON
GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 450, 64MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 900, 128MB RAM, 32MB VIDEO CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

For those who think *Sid Meier's Pirates!* is one of the few Games That Should Be Remade (and now apparently will be), the makers of *Patrician II* may have just answered your prayers—*Port Royale* loosely follows Mr. Meier's buccaneer blueprint but takes it to new strategic depths.

Set in the 15th and 16th centuries as settlements in the Caribbean were coming into prominence, *Port Royale* allows you to sail for the Dutch, the English, the Spanish, or the French, trading goods, running errands for local governors, and fighting (or joining the ranks of) pirates. The game is impressive in its open-endedness, allowing you to trade goods, develop towns, or find a profitable balance of the many options.

Limiting yourself to just one means of income can be a troublesome path. *Port Royale* features a somewhat complex system of supply and demand. As you sell goods, the price decreases, and as you buy them, the price escalates. This system makes it difficult to find a single source of income—Vera Cruz may be paying premium prices for tobacco today, but tomorrow could be a different story. Operating businesses is similarly tricky. Once too many of the same sort opens in a town, the overabundance of goods drives prices down.

As a result, you're constantly adjusting your strategy to keep gold supply high. One method is to run often-lucrative missions for governors; in towns where you are sufficiently respected, the local government will offer you tasks like delivering goods or hunting down a particularly troublesome pirate. As your experience increases, you can hire additional convoys, and these can even be automated to run certain trade routes for you.

This is a game with ship-to-ship combat, however simple.

Once you've explored the map and have a few convoys in your fleet, *Port Royale* gets exponentially complex. It is at this point that the game is the most enjoyable, because there are so many interesting choices available at any given moment. Unfortunately, the early game can be tedious, and once you've commanded 10 fleets from the Yucatan to Havana, it's difficult to find yourself with few known ports and few assets to your name.

It can be difficult to get into—the manual is thin for such a complex game, and there's a notable lack of in-game feedback. But taking the time to learn its ins and outs is a worthwhile task; *Port Royale* offers a great blend of combat and economic strategy.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

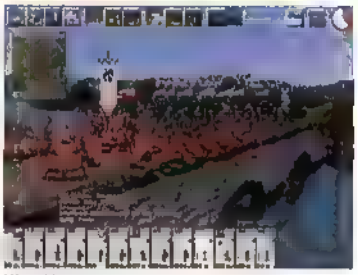
After a slow start, a different (and better) pirate game emerges.

Stalingrad, 1943:
Russia bombarded invaders with the Katyusha launcher's hail of rockets.

This Fall, it's your turn.

Medieval: Total War–Viking Invasion

Odin's war cry BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE



King Harald Hardrada and his Vikings get cut down by King Harold and his famed Huscarles in the epic Battle of Stamford Bridge, 1066 A.D.

Reinforcements are key to any battle. *Viking Invasion* gives you the ability to reinforce your troops on the field at any given time.

EDITOR'S CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $29.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 350, 128MB RAM, 400MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS), LAN (2-8 PLAYERS)

Last year's *Medieval: Total War* blew away many gamers with its masterful scope and design. So it's welcome news that *Viking Invasion* provides the same exhilarating blend of strategy and tactics while enhancing both the campaign game and 3D combat. Creative Assembly has also streamlined the tech tree, tossed in several more unit and building types, added more epic historical 3D battles, and included the Dark Age period. Simply put, this is an outstanding expansion.

Viking Invasion's most prominent feature is the Dark Age campaign, which takes you back to the eighth-century British Isles, where Vikings ravage the region with lightning fast raids using sleek long boats. Creative Assembly does a great job re-creating this fascinating part of history. Each of eight new Dark Age factions—Picts, Welsh, Mercians, Irish, Scots, Saxons, Northumbrians, and Vikings—has its own set of unique units, culture, economy, and religion. Compared to *MTW*'s three large campaign maps of later medieval Europe, this campaign is more focused; therefore, it takes less time to complete.

New units such as the strong attacking Saxon huscarles, the two-handed sword-wielding Irish gallowglasses, raging Viking berserkers, and fleet Irish dartmen, along with several other unit types specific to the eighth-century British Isles, provide an engaging world of warfare and offer new strategic challenges. The noncombat strategy portion of the game is enhanced by spies and assassins (who have benefited from upgrades), taverns, brothels, and drinking halls. Armed with the appropriate upgrades, assassins now have a greater chance of eliminating higher-ranking enemy generals, while spies will find they have a better chance of subterfuge.

Viking Invasion is about warfare, and Creative Assembly deftly introduces a handful of features to its already excellent 3D real-time tactical combat without muddying the battle system. The pre-battle system is a welcome addition, allowing better management of forces before, during, and after combat. Not only do you get to organize reinforcements before the first arrow flies, but you also get to save the game before the fighting begins—just in case things don't go as planned. Spies also have the distinct ability to scout enemy forces and formations in the province you're about ready to conquer.

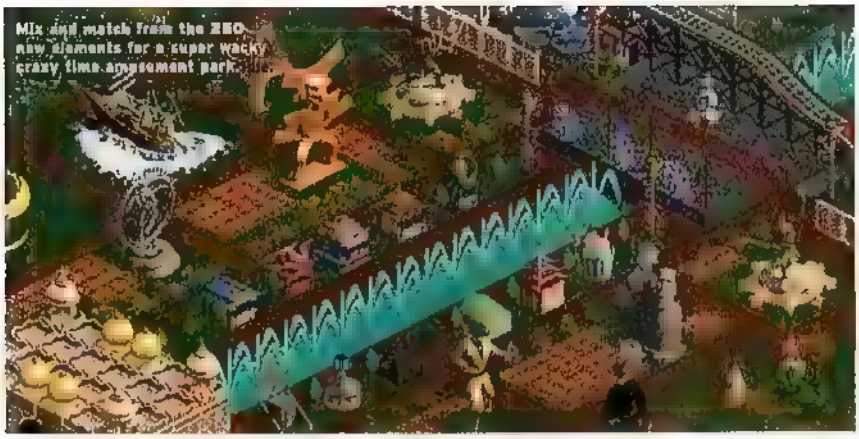
Benefits aren't limited to just the new Dark Age campaign either, as the expansion adds plenty to the original game—including three new factions (Hungarians, Argonese, Sicilians)—to the later three campaigning ages. Armchair tacticians can form armies from 25 unique unit types, such as the Byzantine lancers, agile Sherwood Foresters, Steppe heavy cavalry, and fierce berserkers. Building upgrades are more manageable and provinces are easier to control, which makes administrating your holdings more fluid. For example, the Vice and Virtues report at the beginning of each turn allows for easier overseeing and rewarding of loyal generals.

Viking Invasion is practically a full sequel. The depth and scope of this add-on ensures that fans of *Medieval: Total War* will be keeping the game on their hard drives for a long, long time.

Compared to *Medieval: Total War*'s three large maps, this Dark Age campaign is more focused.

VERDICT ★★★★½

The brand-new Dark Age campaign, lots of new units, and plenty of new gameplay make *Viking Invasion* a must for *Total War* fans.



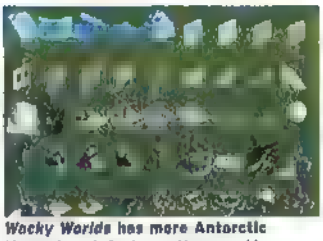
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds

An up-and-down journey around the globe BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER INFOGRAMES
DEVELOPER CHRIS SAWYER
GENRE BUSINESS SIM
ESRB RATING EVERYONE, MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300MHZ, 64MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 400MHZ, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

It's not that *Wacky Worlds* is a bad expansion pack it delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on set: new scenarios and elements. The problem lies with *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2*. After the original *RCT* managed to cling to the top 10 best-seller list for more than two years, just like PC gaming's very own lamprey, an audience was primed and ready for a next gen *RCT* experience. Instead, they got *RollerCoaster Tycoon* with a modest spit polish. If designer Chris Sawyer were looking for an idea way to squander the goodwill and brand-name recognition created by *RCT*'s stellar gameplay, mission accomplished.


Wacky Worlds has more Antarctic themed park features than you'd believe even possible.

to? Well, about 250 odd new "elements," which can be cross-pollinated using the scenario editor, allowing you to mix and match themes from different continents. As far as the effect on gameplay, well, it's almost nil. Many concessions and

Wacky Worlds delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on.

Wacky Worlds builds on this aging foundation but adds nothing to the overall playability of the game. The general specs appear to line up quite nicely, with new content based upon the seven continents. This adds a nicely diverse set of architectural styles, such as igloos (which, technically speaking, would be Arctic rather than Antarctic), a mixed Chinese/Japanese/Indian style, Wild West structures, and the like. Themes extend from the look of buildings to the rides, concessions, and major landmarks, including giant Buddhas, the Great Wall of China, Shakleton's Endurance, and other doodads to dress up your park.

What, exactly, does all this amount

rides are simply old rides with new graphics. While the 17 new scenarios—at least one for each continent—are uniformly good and often interesting, there is, this late in the life of the game, an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. Even the best games can get tired with age, and these repeated attempts to inject new life into the old *RCT* design rather than expanding upon that design results in little more than a face-lift and a tummy tuck.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
It adds some window dressing and a smattering of new scenarios to a game well past its prime.

Normandy, 1944:
U.S. paratroopers
assaulted German forces
with daring drops
behind enemy lines.

This Fall,
it's your turn.

Empire of Magic

Looks like strategy, plays like an RPG

BY GEORGE JONES

GAME STATS

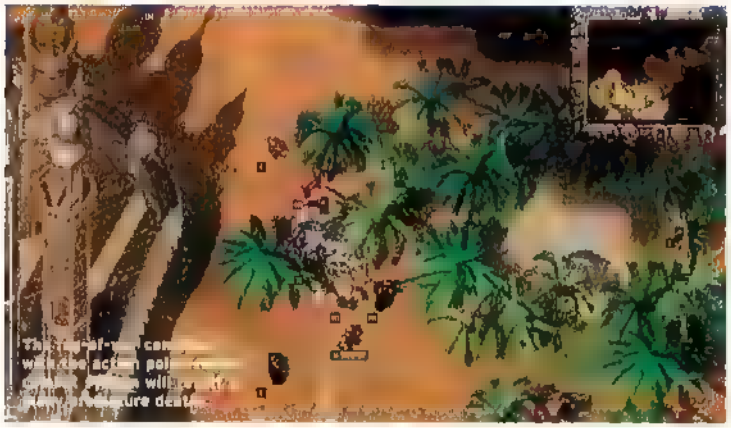
PUBLISHER SUMMITSOFT
DEVELOPER MAYHEM STUDIOS
GENRE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
ESRB RATING TEEN, VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99 REQUIREMENTS
PENTIUM II 600, 128MB
RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE
SPACE RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

If PC games were high art, *Empire of Magic* would be identified and perhaps even lauded as the first shot of the post-neo-*Diablo* or post retro *Diablo* anti-real-time movement. But gaming is firmly rooted in the here and now, so SummitSoft's import from the Slovak Republic will simply be identified and unfairly written off as a cheesy old-school new school RPG in which *Diablo* meets *Heroes of Might and Magic*.

It's an unfortunate and possibly erroneous tag, but understandable. *Empire of Magic* may possess a crude look straight from the early 1990s, but it puts forth a style of play that, while rough and unrefined, also feels fresh enough that RPG gamers will enjoy the experience, if only for a short while.

The setup is classic fantasy role-playing. There's a mystery afoot in a mythical empire, which is being overrun by corruption and the undead. As Yano, the dashing horseman hero, you get pulled into a story that spans 16 long scenarios involving long journeys, massive battles, optional subquests, and characters whose attributes, spells, and skills improve over time.

***Heroes of Might and Magic* could easily steal a few pages from *Empire of Magic*.**



Empire of Magic puts forth a refreshingly retro model of the RPG. Parties (created by simply stacking three units together) have action points that limit their movement and actions; an End Turn button signals the A.I.'s turn to move NPCs and enemy units; combat zooms in on the terrain for a level of tactical strategizing; a diary displays quests and subquests. This methodical attitude looks and feels like that of *Heroes of Might and Magic* but also calls to mind the pleasurable—and not-so-pleasurable aspects—of the fantasy role-playing games of yesteryear.

A great example of *Empire of Magic*'s duality comes in the third scenario. Transported to a desert land, you encounter a massive battle outside a castle pitting good sheiks and guards against the great RPG intro monsters: skeletons and zombies. Watching the little A.I. sheik icons move around and defend their land proves entertaining. But when you win, you get no reward and are sent all the way around the castle through more zombies to a stairway, where an NPC forces you to travel back around the castle and all the way to the north and through more zombies to complete another mini-quest before he helps you. The scenario is fun in spots, but the Fed Ex type missions get tedious real soon.

Still, the *Heroes of Might and Magic* series could easily steal a few pages from *Empire of Magic*, which maintains interest with a consistent hero and contiguous story, which, while overused, connects all 16 scenarios together and weaves non-player characters in and out of the plot.

Unfortunately, *Empire of Magic* doesn't borrow or steal from other RPGs. The combat model, a mere game of checkers compared with *Heroes of Might and Magic*'s chess, unfairly carries over action points into battle. A long walk-up to an enemy encounter will leave friendly units with no action points, which makes for repeated failure and ultimately a slow, crawling pace. Compounding this flaw is the lack of a constant flow of rewards and incentives to keep gamers excited.

Patient and tolerant gamers might feel rewarded with *Empire of Magic*. After all, it's not so bad to slow down every once in a while.

VERDICT

An odd duck of an RPG, *Empire of Magic* both entertains and annoys.

Vietcong

Revisionist History

O.R.B., Vietcong

By Thomas L. McDonald

O.R.B. version 1.04 offers an attractive set of enhancements along with a few fixes that improve overall gameplay. At the top of the bill is a spiffy 3D tactical screen, which replaces the crummy old 2D one. Four new playable units (two frigates for each race) have arrived on the scene, along with one new alien carrier each for the Kyulek and Elathan. Eight skirmish and multiplayer scenarios, a few weapons, and some fresh sound effects round out the slate of additions. The capital-ship limit is up to 20, and the build screen now has a Pause function.

On the maintenance side of things, multiplayer stability is significantly improved, with code enhancements implemented to make *O.R.B.* run more smoothly. The loading time is (thankfully) better, but whether or not it reaches the "200 percent faster" claims of Strategy First is up for debate. That's not really something you can quantify across all computers. The company is also touting better A.I. and improved explosions. On the first count, the A.I. does seem a little better, or maybe it's just cheating better. Good A.I. is like Justice Stewart's famous definition of pornography—"I know it when I see it"—but *O.R.B.*'s A.I. pulls the plow. On the second count, why yes, explosions do look a bit more explosiony.

If you toddle on over to the official site (www.o-r-b.com), you'll also find the second package of three new maps by the Phoenix, along with a 1.04 upgrade to his first map pack.

Vietcong version 1.01 claims a "significantly" improved framerate. "Significantly" is another one of the unquantifiable words in PC gaming, since everyone has a different notion of what "significant improvement" is. *Vietcong* could really use an improvement that a reasonable person might call "significant" or even "adequate." I'd call v.1.01 a "marginal" improvement. The Pterodon engine still kicks few asses and takes down no names whatsoever.

While framerate was by far the most serious problem dogging *Vietcong*, there are a few other fixes in the patch: no more respawning inside another player during multiplayer, a functional team autokick option, and supposedly better cheat protection, though I couldn't verify this last improvement.

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Enter the Matrix

The big Wachowski

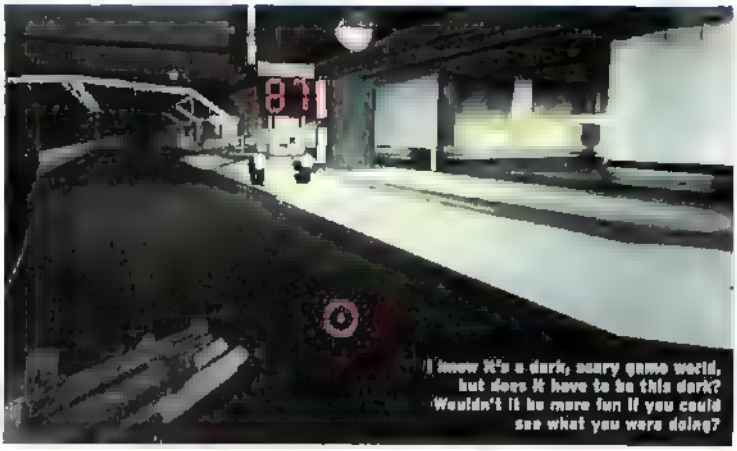
BY CHARLES ARDAI

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ATARI; DEVELOPER: SHINY ENTERTAINMENT; GENRE: ACTION; ESRB RATING: TEEN; MILD LANGUAGE, SUGGESTIVE THEMES, VIOLENCE; PRICE: $49.99; REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM, 4.3GB HARD DRIVE SPACE; RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1.2GHZ, 256MB RAM; MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: TWO PLAYERS (AFTER UNLOCK IN HACKING GAME)

When *The Matrix Reloaded* came out, a number of movie reviewers sneeringly likened the film to a videogame because of the relentlessness of action sequences and the precedence they were allowed to take over matters like character development or the telling of a coherent story. This was a cheap shot—not against the movie, which deserved it, but against videogames. In recent years, game designers have demonstrated amply that a well-written game—such as *Half-Life*, *Deus Ex*, *No One Lives Forever*—can be more than a series of fights strung end to end.

Unfortunately, as games go, *Enter the Matrix* is a step backward. It's basically just a series of fights strung end to end. While it's easy to get excited about the prospect of using all those funky powers from the movies (running up walls, dodging bullets in slow motion, kicking a bad guy across the room), the reality of it isn't all that thrilling after you've tried out all the moves once. Meanwhile, the scenery is drab, the levels are monotonous, and the whole screen starts to stutter each time it fills up with too many combatants. And several times, I died—even on the highest brightness setting, I couldn't tell that I was about to walk off a ledge. Add to this the disappointing fact that your choice of characters is between generic background characters Niobe and Ghost, and you're looking at a game that is seriously short on charisma. (Don't even ask about the game's nearly unplayable driving and sniper sequences.)



I know it's a dark, scary game world, but does it have to be this dark? Wouldn't it be more fun if you could see what you were doing?

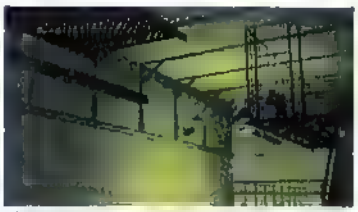
You'd think that given the richly imagined world of the movies, the game designers could have come up with better levels than endless post offices and the like.

There is something rewarding about *Enter the Matrix*, and that's the part that has nothing to do with playing a game.

And yet, there is something rewarding about *Enter the Matrix*, something deeply, viscerally satisfying, and that's the part that has nothing to do with playing a game. Each time the action stops for a cut-scene—some animated using the in-game engine, others filmed on the actual sets and featuring the movie's cast—your heart leaps. In the very first scene, when Ghost justifies the way he reloads his gun with an allusion to the philosophical writings of David Hume (1711-1776), you know you're in for some above-average dialogue.

Yes, it would be better if the game were more fun to play. It's frustrating that each time the game reaches a climactic moment that calls for some major derring-do, a cut-scene kicks in and the derring gets done without any input from you. But that doesn't change the fact that the cut-scenes are great fun to watch.

Just like in the movies, there's gunplay aplenty.



Filmed cut-scenes and in-engine ones like this one are the highlight of the game.

It's ironic: *The Matrix Reloaded* may have been a better videogame than it was a movie, and now along comes *Enter the Matrix*, and it turns out to be a better movie than it is a game. Sometimes you just can't win. But then, any student of Hume already knows that.

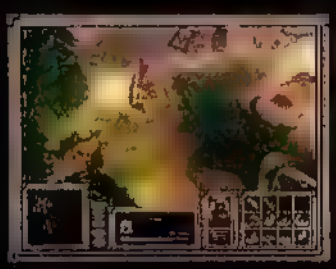
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

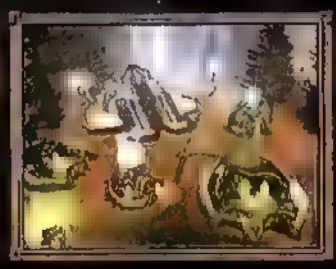
Play it for the movies, don't play it for the play.

SAVAGE

The Battle for Newerth

COMING SOON





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The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II

A different kind of tomb raider BY DENICE COOK

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER THE ADVENTURE COMPANY DEVELOPER OMNI ADVENTURES GENRE ADVENTURE ESRB RATING EVERYONE, MILD VIOLENCE PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 824MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 400, 128MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Developer Omni Adventures has a skeleton crew in more ways than one. First, its games are created almost in their entirety by husband-and-wife team Jeff and Karen Tobler, and second, both of its works are archeological puzzle adventures. *The Omega Stone*, sequel to Omni's 2000 release *Riddle of the Sphinx*, manages more diversity by adding locales such as the Bermuda Triangle, Easter Island, Stonehenge, and the Yucatan's Chichen Itza to the Egypt an spelunking of the first game. And although *The Omega Stone*'s doomsday prophecies first sound as timeworn as its adventure game topics of Egypt, Atlantis, and the Knights Templar, its plot actually has more backbone than a Celtic cemetery's. The story seamlessly blends historical facts with engrossing fiction, adding another twist with every book, letter, or scroll you uncover. Challenging puzzles also emerge from the landscapes and link ancient symbols and archeological artifacts to future chaos.

Cryptic patterns emerge in the most unlikely places, so examine each scene carefully.

While a cohesive story and organic puzzles make the game a gem, it doesn't mean this *Stone* is flawless.

However, while a cohesive story and organic puzzles make the game a gem, it doesn't mean this *Stone* is flawless. Even though some skull collecting leads to two creepy puzzles, exploring the dark catacombs under Chichen Itza to get the skulls becomes drawn out and disorienting because of the long look-alike paths. Moreover, the dim graininess of the caverns sometimes turns your excavations into pixel hunts. (Yes, *Stone*'s graphics are an improvement upon its predecessor's, but they're still grainy in spots and somewhat blurry overall.) It's also surprising that an archeologist in the year 2012 isn't equipped with a lantern or a mapping device. Subterranean skulduggery aside, there is one other annoying area later at a posh mansion, where you must navigate a garden maze twice.

But overall, *The Omega Stone*'s puzzles are absorbing and intricate. A moonlit cemetery harbors stones with markings paralleling those seen in ancient texts. How you correlate these stones to manuscripts you find about alchemy and how you use materials such as crystal, sulfur, and mercury will determine whether you save the world or not. Oh, and did I mention that you can be incinerated, blown up, or electrocuted during the game? At least *The Omega Stone* is an exciting puzzle game, and the ending creatively explains the link between the locales you've visited. Despite *Stone*'s imperfections, this nicely improved sequel is worth digging up.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A puzzling archeological find that adventure gamers will dig.

Uplink: Hacker Elite

L33T! BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER STRATEGY FIRST DEVELOPER INTROVERSION SOFTWARE GENRE CYBER CRIME SIMULATION ESRB RATING EVERYONE PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 32MB RAM, 250MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 500, 64MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Like the anti-establishment hackers that the game tries to depict, *Uplink* goes against the norm of modern games. Instead of 3D graphics, you have a low-res, bare-bones look resembling something from the CGA era. Rather than giving you instant gratification, the game rewards research, preparation, and covering your tracks thoroughly. And it's damn fun.

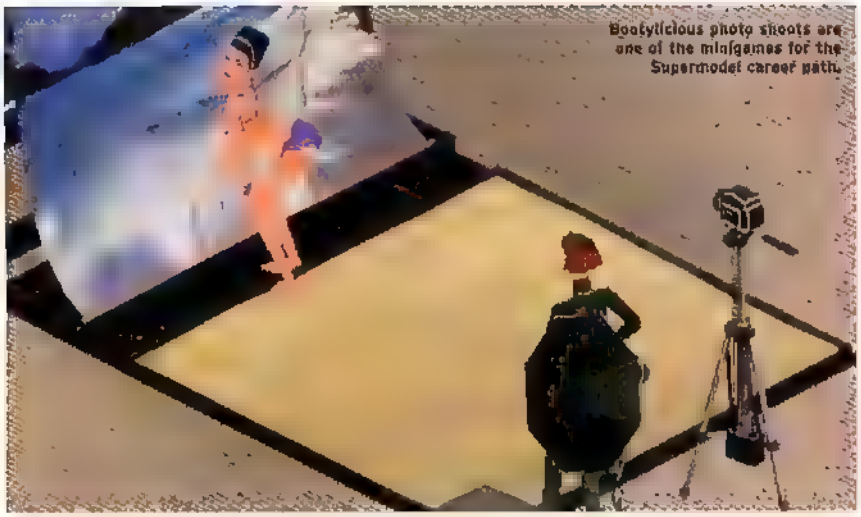
As an enterprising hacker, your goal in *Uplink* is to make money and upgrade your equipment as you get rich. You accept missions through a bulletin board, scout out targets on a world map, bounce your connections around to hide your steps, and then attempt to crack your target. Once in, you'll use various specialized tools to copy information, sabotage files, and forge records. Some of the more complicated missions will even involve cracking security devices protected by voice recognition and file encryption. While the early missions are cakewalks, the more challenging ones can be quite exciting, especially when seconds mean the difference between rich rewards and incarceration.

It takes a while to actually get into the somewhat convoluted conspiracy story in *Uplink*, and the gameplay eventually becomes repetitive, but for a while, it's a breath of fresh air in a gaming world with stilted ideas.

Hrm, let's make this guy a dead man, shall we?

VERDICT ★★★½☆

An intriguing premise and quality execution make *Uplink* a winner.



Bootylicious photo shoots are one of the minigames for the Supermodel career path.

The Sims: Superstar

Bella Goth gets her 15 minutes of fame

BY ELIZABETH MCADAMS

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER MAXIS
ESRB RATING TEEN; COMIC MISCHIEF, MATURE SEXUAL THEMES, MILD VIOLENCE, PUBLIC URINATION
PRICE $29.95
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 350, 64MB RAM, 1.3GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Almost everyone has fantasized about being famous, and now in *The Sims: Superstar* you can find out what it would be like—albeit virtually.

Superstar allows you to venture down three new career tracks and actively determine and witness how your Sim's career advances. As in previous expansions like *Hot Date* and *Vacation*, a brand-new location (in this case Studio Town) has been included. Here, you can follow your dreams and become the next singing sensation, the latest ingénue actress, or a sexy model. Whichever career you choose, you'll gain your own entourage of groupies as you manipulate the new Fame-focused gameplay. It's all about who you know and who knows you in Studio Town.

Perhaps the best part of living the life of a celebrity is the luxuries—spa treatments, sushi dinners, and a butler await you in *Superstar*. After a truly exhausting day working the catwalk, you can relax with a steam bath and a visit from Inga, the Swedish massage sensation.

The Fame part of the game gives "starpower" to each Sim who has signed up with an agent; each star you receive unlocks areas of the game, and the possibility of getting new objects and interactions will motivate you to invest quality time in *Superstar*. Obviously, the game becomes more challenging as you progress, and your Fame may decay if you play hooky from Studio Town too often.

Superstar takes a small cue from the console versions of the franchise by adding minigames in the form of performances for your budding celebrity. Musicians perform in music videos, models strut on catwalks and actors perform in scenes—all of these activities are broken down into three sections, and you have three chances to make the right choices to please your director or audience. Choose the right dance moves for your music video and your career will bloom; make the wrong decisions in that big fight scene and your career may stall. The random nature of these minigames makes them more an exercise in guesswork than actual strategizing, but sequences are done with typical Maxis flair and remain entertaining several hours into the game.

Inga beats the hell out of, er, massages, a virtual Brad Pitt.

The pursuit of fame and fortune adds a new level of intensity to an already overly addictive game. *The Sims: Superstar* is a worthwhile investment for diehard fans and newbies alike.

VERDICT ★★★★½

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Blitzkrieg

World War II in real-time BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER CDV
DEVELOPER NIVAL INTERACTIVE
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN: VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 366, 64MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-6 PLAYERS)

When real-time games seized their first beachhead, hardcore wargamers were dismissive. Good, realistic wargames could not, the common wisdom went, be done in real time, primarily because RTS games eschew lavish tactics in favor of fast pacing. Time and titles such as *Close Combat* and *Sid Meier's Gettysburg* have proved that realism and real-time are not mutually exclusive, but a good, large-scale realistic World War II game has yet to roll into battle. *Sudden Strike* didn't do it, nor did *World War II: Panzer Claws*. *Blitzkrieg* doesn't, either, but it has a fun time trying, largely succeeding with a game that can best be described as "realish."

Blitzkrieg accomplishes this by modeling the statistics that matter and placing them in a real time context. For example, armored units have ratings for front, rear, and side armor strength, and each unit tracks shells and machine guns independently. Tanks can throw a tread or be disabled without being destroyed and a battlefield repair unit can get them up and running again. Units expend their ammunition as they fight, requiring fairly constant attention to logistics.

Clearly, much research went into this game, and much of it is apparent in the gameplay. The problem comes down to one of scale. For a game to be realistic, it needs to work with historical orders of battle, which were vast and complex. *Blitzkrieg* deals with infantry abstractly, placing men on the field as part of a generic squad that can be moved as a single unit in marching, assault, or defensive formations. Although this effectively removes it from the realm of realistic wargame, it creates a remarkably playable game that captures the feel and many of the tactics of WWII operations.

The other large flaw is the quirky handling of air power. All aircraft (fighter, bomber, recon, and airdrop planes) are assigned to a single pool. You can only launch one mission at a time, and then you have to wait for an arbitrary cycle to end before you can access the pool and launch another mission. This effectively eliminates fighter support and relegates bombing to a rather confusing supporting role. Aircraft follow a preset route and cannot be controlled once they take off.

The maps provide a handsome 2D terrain complete with functional elevations and plenty of roads, rivers, houses, buildings, supply depots, and places for ambush. Infantry can pile into buildings for house-to-house fighting, dig in, build bridges, lay mines, and establish various defensive structures. The units and vehicles themselves are 3D and to scale, which has its up- and downsides. They do look quite good complete with impressive special effects, but without a zoom or rotate feature, individual infantry units such as the sniper simply vanish into the map.

While there's no shortage of gameplay spread among the three campaigns (Axis, Allied, and Soviet, each with seven long missions), extra features are somewhat wanting. A Skirmish mode didn't make the cut, and a paltry three stand-alone missions are all that exist beyond the campaigns. Multiplayer modes feature Assault and Flag-Capture set on a dozen or so unique maps, but Internet play is a bit sluggish.

Overall, however, *Blitzkrieg* delivers the best World War II real-time gaming experience to date. It may be faint praise, but with so many stale RTS games, it's good to find one that can hold your attention.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A sturdy meat-and-taters real-time wargame that even manages a bit of realism.

Blitzkrieg looks fabulous, with the smooth movement of 3D objects (there are about 250 units) and detailed 2D terrain.

Snow, desert, and European tile and building styles give the game a sharp, diverse look. All of these tiles and objects can be manipulated in the editor.

Blitzkrieg delivers the best World War II real-time gaming experience to date.

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CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

Another one bites the dust BY DANA JONGEWAARD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER 369 INTERACTIVE
GENRE BAD TV SHOW LICENSING
ESRB RATING MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 128MB RAM, 350MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 500, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Lots of people will buy *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and enjoy it. They will write reviews on Amazon.com, raving about complexity of gameplay and excellence of the graphics. Most of these people, however, wouldn't recognize a quality computer game if it bit them in the ass.

CSI the game offers you the TV show's music and intro, voice acting from all of the show's regular cast members, and dialogue from the show's writers. Your character is a new member of the force, and in each of the five cases, you work to solve the mystery with a different partner from the TV cast.

It's not a bad game, but neither is it a good one. Playtime is incredibly short (unless you're stupid); I easily polished off the game in one day at work, in between several meetings and a long martini-laden lunch. The graphics are less scary than those in some equivalent games (*cough* *Law & Order*), but you still get stuck watching long, boring cut-scenes of conversations between characters.

Playtime is incredibly short unless you're stupid.

Gil and Catherine in a tender moment.

And players who perform well enough are rewarded with (oh, excitement) concept sketches of characters from each case.

If you're a big fan of the show, not a big computer gamer, and not that bright, then this game is well worth your time and money. If, however, you don't meet all of the above criteria, then I would save both for a game of the non-licensed variety.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes.

Heroes of Might and Magic 4: Winds of War

Dial "M" for murdered franchise BY JONAH JACKSON

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER 3DO DEVELOPER NEW WORLD COMPUTING
GENRE TURN-BASED STRATEGY
ESRB RATING EVERYONE, ANIMATED BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 128MB RAM, 160MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 400,256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-6 PLAYERS)

3DO. 3DO customer service, how may we help you?

Me: Hi. I just bought the new *HoMM4* expansion pack and...

3DO: You mean *Winds of War*, the second all-new expansion pack loaded with new features and maps.

Me: Um, yeah. Anyway, I think I'm missing the manual. I have only a flimsy CD liner that vaguely mentions three new units and six new creature generators.

3DO: No, sir, you're not missing anything. That's it.

Me: But where is the information about the improved A.I.?

3DO: There isn't any. It's the same A.I.

Me: How about the random scenario generator?

3DO: No random maps. You can always use the map editor to make your own.

Me: Did you improve that?

3DO: Not much, but we did include several maps that were actually designed by fans. You could use those as a model.

Me: You mean you're charging $30 for a bunch of content that wasn't even designed by you?

3DO: Yep. Pretty sweet, huh?

Me: OK, well did you add anything else, maybe some additional town or hero types?

3DO: Nope.

Me: New spells?

3DO: Nope.

Me: New artifacts?

3DO: Yes!

Me: Useful ones?

3DO: Nope.

Me: So, aside from a bunch of new maps, is there anything that makes this expansion pack worth the money I spent?

3DO: There's some more of that irritatingly repetitive style of music. Oh, and did you play the campaign in which the king is named Spazz Maticus? That's some hilarious writing.

Me: Uh-huh. Thanks.

3DO: No problem. Feel free to call again. And look for our next exciting expansion, *HoMM4: Goblins Gone Wild*.

[*click*]

Luckily, vampires can still suck the life force out of those mean catapults.

You mean you're charging $30 for a bunch of content that wasn't even designed by you?

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆
The degeneration continues.

REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
1503 A.D.: The New World	6/03	The game's depth keeps things interesting, if not addictive	★★★½
American Conquest	5/03	Impossible to control, impossible to play	★★½
Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome	5/03	Great new maps and weapons enhance an already-classic multiplayer shooter	★★★★
BloodRayne	7/03	Mildly distracting, fairly generic, totally tasteless	★★
Casino Inc.	7/03	Been there, done that business sim with hookers	★★
Championship Manager 4	7/03	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★½
Chemicus: Journey to the Other Side	5/03	Puts the "bore" in "boron"	★★
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	4/03	Plenty of new stuff for the serious *DAOC* addict	★★★½
Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down	6/03	This surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics	★★★★
Devastation	7/03	Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release	★½
Enclave	7/03	20 to 30 hours of gameplay, not one of them worth a damn	★½
Europa 1400: The Guild	5/03	There are three or four games lurking here, all of them enjoyable	★★★½
EverQuest: The Legacy of Ykesha	6/03	It's about time for Sony to ease up on the constant *EQ* expansions	★★½
Freelancer	5/03	The finest space sim since *FreeSpace 2* and *Privateer*	★★★★½
Galactic Civilizations	6/03	Triumphs where *MOO3* fails—the best 4X space game in years	★★★★½
The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games	6/03	Run-of-the-mill blood sport	★★½
Grom	7/03	This pallid *Indiana Jones* clone is hamstrung by horrible controls	★½
Harbinger	6/03	This sci-fi *Diablo* clone is tepid at best	★★
High Heat 2004	6/03	A great franchise goes in the wrong direction	★★½
Highland Warriors	5/03	Better than haggis, but not by much	★★½
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7/03	This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces	★½
IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles	6/03	The paragon of WWII flight sims	★★★★½
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/03	It may look a little funky, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	6/03	A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bonus of a T-rex eating people	★★★½
Laser Squad Nemesis	6/03	Incredibly addictive play-by-e-mail tactical strategy	★★★★½
Line of Sight: Vietnam	7/03	Keep this lousy shooter out of your sights	★½
Master of Orion 3	5/03	This disappointment demands too much and provides far too little	★★½
MVP Baseball 2003	6/03	This is the PC baseball game to buy this year	★★★½
NASCAR Racing 2003 Season	5/03	Papyrus' last *NASCAR* game goes out with a whimper	★★★½
New World Order	7/03	Just about the lousiest shooter ever	½
Postal 2	7/03	No	½
Post-Mortem	6/03	Five-star story undone by two-star dialogue	★★★½
Praetorians	5/03	This rewarding game eases the pain of waiting for *Rome: Total War*	★★★★
Pro Race Driver	7/03	The self-proclaimed "carPG" is utterly lame	½
PureSim Baseball 2003	5/03	If you're looking for a good text-based baseball GM sim, this is the game for you	★★★½
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/03	Surpasses the earlier *R6* games in every way to become the definitive tac-sim	★★★★½
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	7/03	Decent console port with finicky camera control	★★★
Restaurant Empire	6/03	Forget those champagne wishes and caviar dreams—this is closer to Denny's	★★
Revolution	6/03	You say you want a revolution? Not this one you don't	★½
Silent Hill 2	4/03	It'll bore you...to death	★★½
The Sims Online	4/03	More chat room than game, this is the first blemish on the *Sims* empire	★★½
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	7/03	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★½
Unreal II: The Awakening	4/03	Only the early parts of this FPS match the outstanding graphics. Sagginess ensues	★★★★
Vietcong	7/03	Vietnam shooters finally come of age in this solid title	★★★½
World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	6/03	There's a whole lot more to this racer than "rednecks turning left"	★★★½

CGW RECOMMENDS

A Tale in the Desert

★★

This MMORPG is worth checking out if you're more into the social aspect of online gaming than the combat. Is there another online RPG that lets you pursue a career as a leader, an artist, or an architect? If you're a gamer who touts gameplay over graphics, this *Desert* is worth exploring.

Shadowbane

★

In *Shadowbane*, players are encouraged to work together to build and maintain their own sprawling cities—and then go out and destroy the cities of their enemies. This game eschews the plodding character advancement and dungeon-crawling typical of MMORPGs in order to let players rapidly develop powerful characters suited for *Shadowbane*'s signature castle sieges.

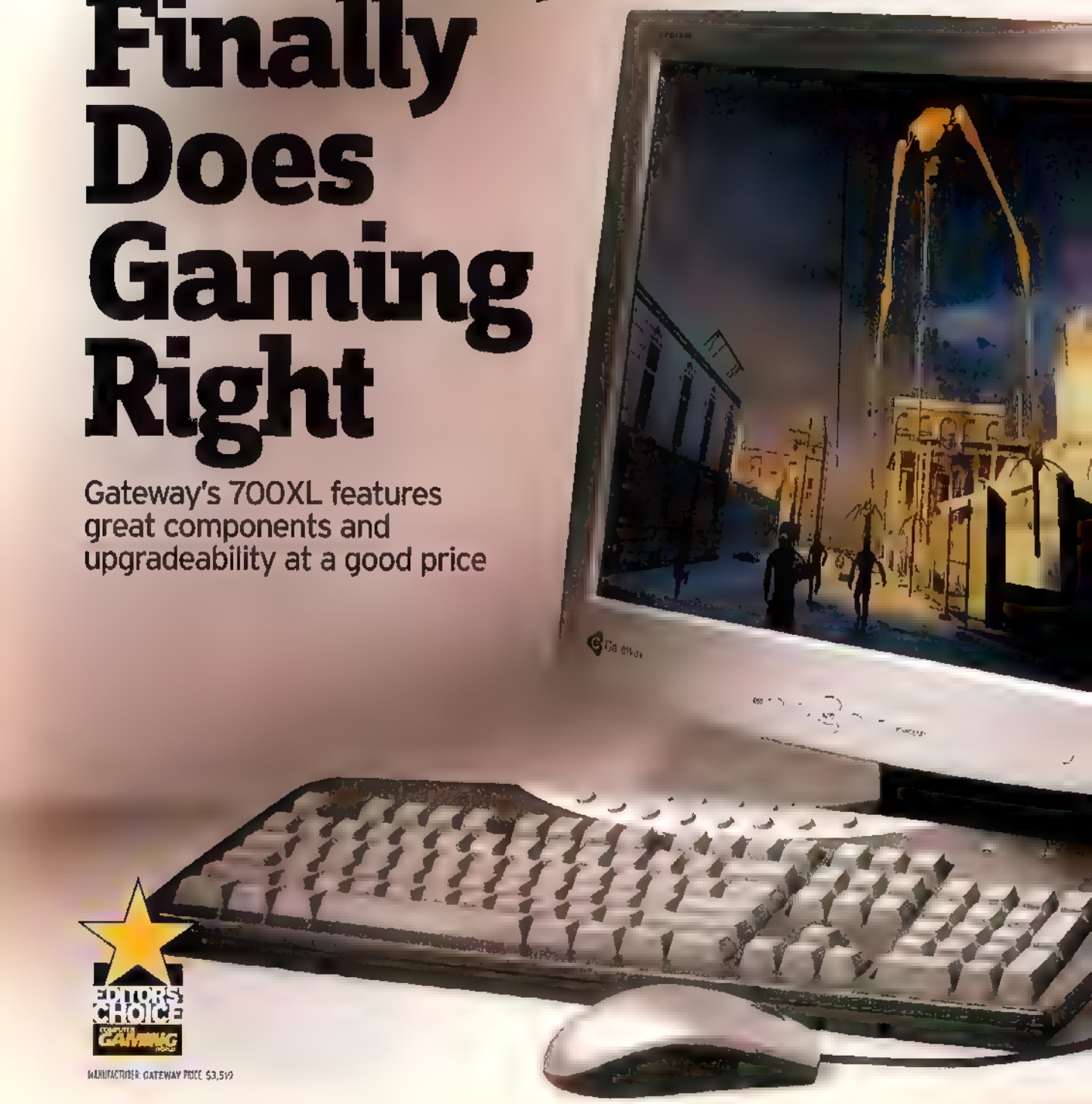
Bookworm Deluxe

Want to feel inadequate? Check out the unbelievably high scores online for the latest insidiously addictive puzzle game from evil geniuses at Popcap. Part *Boggle*, part *Bejeweled*, all mind-consuming, this voracious gobbler of time has done more to impede *CGW*'s productivity than Nickel Beer Night. Download and register it at www.popcap.com at your own risk.

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money

Gateway Finally Does Gaming Right

Gateway's 700XL features great components and upgradeability at a good price



EDITORS' CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

MANUFACTURER: GATEWAY PRICE: $3,519

I was shocked when the people at Gateway contacted me a few weeks ago about their latest gaming rig, the 700XL. You see, for the past couple of years, I've consistently slammed Gateway for shipping gaming rigs that failed to live up to the promise of their components. Outfits from Dell to Alienware use the same components that Gateway uses, yet their machines consistently outperform Gateway's offerings. What is Gateway doing to slow down these machines? Well, that question is moot, as the latest 700XL does more than simply live up to the promise of its components; it actually manages to perform quite well.

The first thing I do when a machine shows up is open the case to check out what's going on inside. Gateway shipped the 700XL with some impressive components, most notably Intel's D875PBZ (Canterwood) motherboard. As a starting point, you can't beat that motherboard, which has an 800MHz frontside bus and support for DDR 400 memory. The 700XL also rocks a 3GHz (800MHz FSB) Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of DDR 400, two 250GB hard drives in an incredible 500GB RAID configuration, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro! Not only do these components contribute to the Gateway, matching Dell's similarly equipped Dimension XPS (reviewed in the July issue) in nearly every test, but they also help make the rig pretty damn similar to the Falcon machine I also

reviewed in that issue. The Gateway scored 2589 in 3DMark2003 at 1024x768x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on. Compare that to the 2619 the Falcon scored and the 2533 that the Dell managed. In actual game tests, the 700XL's performance was similar to the Dell's, scoring 56 frames per second in 3DGameGauge at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on; the Dell scored 57 frames per second. In fact, while the Gateway dominated the Dell in benchmark tests, the two machines were so close in actual gameplay that it was easy to call the competition a draw in that area. It's also important to note that the Gateway sports more bells and whistles than the Dell, is nearly $500 cheaper, and includes an 18-inch LCD—a display that works surprisingly well with games.

While the 700XL beats the XPS in many tests, the fact that it's significantly more upgradeable is an enormous advantage. Also, while the Dell shipped with its proprietary Intel i850-based motherboard, the 700XL shipped with Intel's D875PBZ motherboard. And unlike Dell's case, Gateway's is more standard. You can quickly remove the panel and access all of the components, and because it has a more standard ATX configuration, you can easily change the motherboard or even upgrade the power supply. Other touches that make the Gateway appealing are its eight USB 2.0 ports (two in the front and six in the rear), as well as four FireWire ports (three in the front and one in the rear). Hardcore types are gonna wonder about Gateway's continued decision to go with Boston Acoustics speakers, but the fact remains that the BA7900s are great.

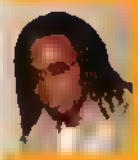
For gamers interested in getting a gaming rig from a more mainstream company, there used to be one choice: Dell. Now, with its revamped 700XL, Gateway has established that when it comes to those mainstream gaming rigs, it's no longer a one-horse race.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A great choice for gamers who want to buy a machine from a more mainstream outfit.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	GATEWAY 700XL	DELL DIMENSION XPS
Price	$3,519	$4,000
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	3GHz Intel Pentium 4	3GHz Intel Pentium 4
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ (Canterwood)	Dell Intel i850-based
Memory	1GB DDR 400	1GB DDR 400
Hard drive	Dual 250GB 7200RPM in 500GB RAID array	Dual 120GB 7200RPM in 240GB RAID array
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2
Primary drive	DVD+RW drive	16x DVD-ROM drive
Secondary drive	48x/24x/48x CD-ROM drive	DVD+RW drive
Monitor	18-inch Gateway FPD1830 (flat panel LCD)	18-inch Dell 1800FP (flat panel LCD)
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA7900 5.1 speakers	Logitech Z-680 5.1 speakers
Keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard
Mouse	Logitech USB Optical Wheel mouse	Logitech MX500 mouse
Speed (Performance)	4.5	4.5
Price	4	4
Stability	5	5
Support	5	5
Upgradeability	5	3
SCORE	4.70	4.30



WIL

Got wireless?

There was a time—not so long ago—that I not only didn't own a cell phone but also didn't even really see the need for one, other than for emergencies. For a long time, I felt the same way about broadband Internet access. I spend all day on my company's T1 line, so why should I spend $50 a month to do what I can do at work for free?

Of course, I bit the bullet and became like every other cell phone-toting member of Generation X. Now I am never without my cell phone, and whenever a fancy new one comes out (with features I'll never use), I have to have it. You don't believe me? I was one of the first people to get Samsung's SPH-A500 model, and downloading 50 Cent's "In da Club" as a ring tone actually made me happy. The DSL connection I finally ponied up for makes me just as happy—few things

The DSL I finally ponied up for makes me happy.

are as simple and convenient as an "always on" broadband connection.

The latest technology I've reluctantly adopted but now can't live without is wireless Internet access. A while ago, Actiontec sent me its 802.11b wireless-ready gateway and router. It sat in a box in my office for well over a year before I even took it home. When I finally set it up, I was floored by how easy it was to get it up and running, and sitting on my couch with a laptop that's wirelessly connected to the Internet is the bomb. Belkin recently sent me its 54g wireless solution, and it's even more impressive than Actiontec's. If you're like me and you use both desktop and laptop computers, then there's no reason for you not to jump on this bandwagon. While it's easy to think you don't need wireless Internet access at home, once you get it going, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it.

Gaming Rig for the People

If you don't have $4,000 to drop on a computer, iBuypower's Zillion Pro could be for you **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

EDITOR'S CHOICE
COMPUTER GAMING

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: IBUYPOWER
PRICE: $1,995

Compared to behemoths from Gateway, Dell, and Falcon, iBuypower's strangely named Zillion Pro PC is a breath of fresh air. It doesn't rock the biggest, baddest component list around, but it's a terrifically solid nForce2-based machine that more than gets the job done at a reasonable price.

What the Zillion Pro tells me is that you don't have to drop three large on a top-notch machine to get the most out of the games currently available. The machine we tested was built around MSI's K7N2 Delta nForce2 motherboard, and it came equipped with 1GB of DDR400, AMD's Athlon XP 3200+ processor, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro—which explains why the Zillion Pro performed so well. Its scores were lower than those of the Gateway 700XL, but not by much. That's astonishing when you compare their prices.

The Zillion Pro's 3DMark2003 score of 2533 at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4X AF turned on totally competes with more expensive Pentium 4-based machines. That said, in some game tests, the Zillion Pro didn't perform as well, compared to the Pentium machines, at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4X AF turned on. But we're really talking about only a few frames per second. In other words, while you can run games at 1600x1200 with all the features turned on, don't expect the Zillion Pro to be as fast as some Pentium 4-based machines—but you should have no problem running games at 1024x768 and 1280x1024 with the features on.

As I mentioned, the Zillion Pro's price is great. And this computer is also an extremely upgradeable machine, and many people seem to think Nvidia's nForce2 audio is better than Creative's. The Zillion Pro comes with some excellent peripherals, like Viewsonic's 19 inch E90F+SB monitor and Klipsch's GMX D-51 speakers (which, as we all know, work perfectly well with the onboard nForce2 audio solution).

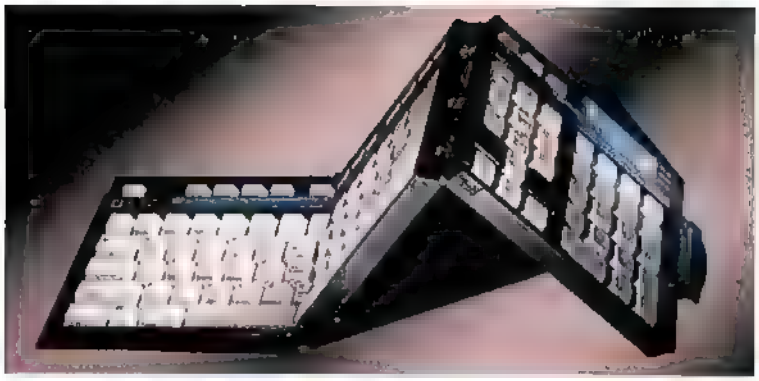
Ultimately, the first question I ask when someone is looking to get a new rig is "How much are you willing to spend?" If your answer to that question is something less than "My kids' inheritance," you'll no doubt appreciate this rig.

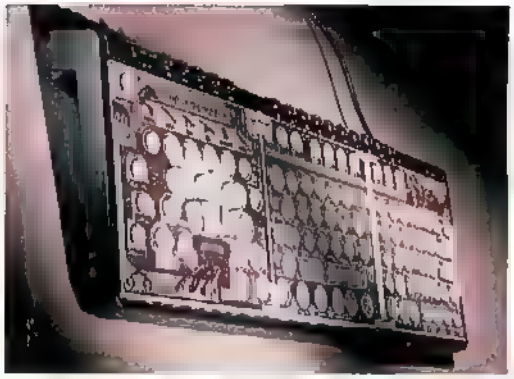
BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	IBUYPOWER ZILLION PRO PC	GATEWAY 700XL
Price	$1,995	$3,519
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ (400MHz FSB)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4
Motherboard	MSI K7N2-Delta nForce2 (400MHz FSB)	Intel D875PBZ (Canterwood)
Memory	1GB DDR 400	1GB DDR 400
Hard drive	Western Digital 7200RPM 120GB hard drive	Dual 250GB 7200RPM hard drives in 500GB RAID array
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
Soundcard	Integrated nForce2 5.1 Audio	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2
Primary drive	16x DVD-ROM drive	DVD-RW drive
Secondary drive	52x/24x/52x CD-ROM drive	40x/24x/40x CD-ROM drive
Monitor	19 inch Viewsonic E90F+SB	18-inch Gateway FPD1810 (flat panel LCD)
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia GMX D-51 speakers	Boston Acoustics BA7900 5.1 speakers
Keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard
Mouse	N/A	Logitech USB Optical Wheel mouse
Speed (Performance)	4	4.5
Price	5	4
Stability	5	5
Support	4	5
Upgradeability	5	5
SCORE	4.60	4.70

VERDICT ★★★★½

A fast, well-priced gaming rig.





The War to Replace the Keyboard and Mouse

Ideazon's Zboard is actually a good idea **BY DARREN GLADSTONE**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER IDEAZON
PRICE $39.95; $20 FOR ADDITIONAL OVERLAYS

Don't get me started on how the keyboard and mouse combo is the only way to go when it comes to controlling games. Companies ranging from Belkin to Saitek have tried to reinvent the gaming wheel with unsightly hunks of plastic. Finally, after countless harebrained ideas, something half-decent comes along—Ideazon's Zboard.

It's a pretty simple concept when you think about it. You're going to need that keyboard anyway, so why clutter your valuable desk space with some semifunctional lump of modern art? Instead, Zboard's base remains the same, but you can remove and latch on preprogrammed game-friendly keyboards. The Zboard comes with a relatively generic but amply tactile keyboard. It starts veering into the cool range when you slap on game specific overlays like the one made for *Medal of Honor*.

Keys are spaced specifically for the staunchest FPS fan, and it works wonders in the game it's designed for. There are two problems with the execution here, though. First is the fact that this keyboard is PS/2 only. That's not a big deal for most desktop owners, but many without legacy ports will be left in the cold. Second, and more important, is that you can't use the keyboard with other first person shooters. So, you're basically expected to shell out 20 bucks for every game you like playing if you want to take advantage of this keyboard. This keeps Zboard from earning better marks, but if Ideazon can create some firmware upgrade/software patch, this could be the must-have item in every gamer's arsenal.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

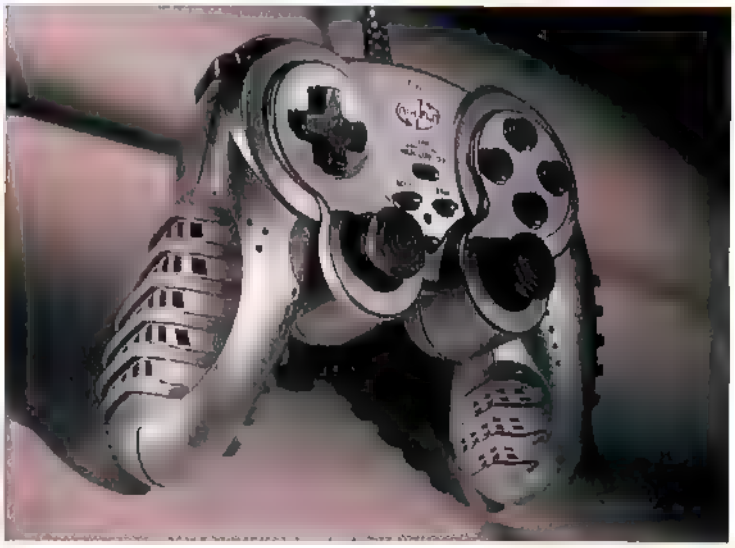
It's about time someone came up with a good keyboard solution. Now just fix it!

This Controller Blows—in a Good Way

Sweaty-palmed gameboys will be happy to know there's a peripheral built just for them **BY DARREN GLADSTONE**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER NYKO
PRICE $29.95



Gamers must be a freakish, sweaty lot you'd never want to meet in public. At least that's the impression I got using Nyko's Air Flo controller: this console-inspired gamepad has a lot of ventilation holes and a fan built into its frame. Nyko released similar controllers for the consoles last year, and now it's the PC's turn at bat.

For paws that tend to overheat, this controller is manna from heaven, but I'm here to tell you, folks, if your hands sweat this much, maybe you should put the controller down and get yourself some Gold Bond powder. Gimmicks aside, the Air Flo actually feels good. The rubberized hand grips and responsive buttons slip into your hands nicely, giving you a very PS2-like gamepad.

The Air Flo works well enough as a plug and play device, whether blasting air on your damp mitts or not. The one thing you should be aware of is that as a USB powered controller, you probably won't get ample juice from an unpowered hub for the Air Flo to work properly.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Sturdy? Check. Feels good in the hand? Yep. Lotsa holes and a fan? Who cares?

DEFINING A CULTURE. CREATING A NATION

XBN XBOX NATION

THE **ADVANCED** XBOX MAGAZINE

ZIFF DAVIS

PICK ONE UP ON NEWSSTANDS EVERYWHERE

Loyd's Cracked Case

Friday night follies By Loyd Case

On most Friday nights, a bevy of cars pulls up outside my house and a motley crew makes its way down to my basement. They think they're here to play LAN games.

OK, so they *are* here to play LAN games—but there's an ulterior purpose for their visit. The Friday Night Follies LAN party actually exists to test system and network stability. If games are the most demanding applications a PC must run, then multiplayer networked PC games are even more demanding.

During networked games, I've seen graphics-hardware problems I would never see during a single-player game. I've seen audio work beautifully in single player and then crap out during multiplayer. Curiously, playing online—even over a broadband internet connection—doesn't seem to offer quite the same test as playing over a LAN.

Of course, the members of the Friday Night Follies gang have varying perspectives on all this. One is an Apple employee who continually complains about how much Windows sucks. For some reason, PC hardware seems to fail more often when he uses it. Said failures completely vanish when I sit down at the same system—and these issues aren't specific to one system, either. Perhaps there's some technological irony at work.

The Follies crew and me, we have a deal: They don't complain about the need to frequently reinstall games and play on systems totally different from those they were on last week. In return, they (usually) get a great gaming experience on recent or even bleeding edge hardware. Manufacturers of PC hardware who ship me gear before it's released may get a little nervous as they read that, but most of the Friday Night Follies crew isn't in the tech business. Even the Apple employee never talks business—he's not in marketing, and I don't bug him to leak stuff about Apple.

Network gaming has become an integral part of my testing process. When I bring up new hardware—be it a motherboard, CPU, graphics card, or soundcard—I always hold final judgment until I can see how it performs in an intense LAN gaming session.

Over the years, I've developed a list of pet peeves and bad habits exhibited by many PC multiplayer games. In a magnanimous gesture, I offer them here in the hope that game developers might heed the call.

Please, please let's have more games that offer co-op play.

- LAN game servers that feel compelled to check the master server. Never mind that the LAN may not actually be connected to the internet.
- Games that require a CD per person for LAN gaming. I recall fondly the days when *Age of Empires* or *WarCraft II* allowed three players per CD. For seven grownups, it's no big deal to buy a copy per person. But a parent who wants to play a multiplayer game with their kids will have to buy two or more copies. This is about as likely as Jeff Green winning a Pulitzer for his column.
- Games that don't report their version number in a very visible place. Hint: The Main menu would be good. If you patch a multiplayer game, you usually have to patch every copy because you typically can't play together with different versions of the game. It's astonishing how many games make it freaking impossible to find the version number!
- No multiplayer saves. This really bugs me, especially in long games. Curiously, the worst offender is a game that allows a weird sort of partial save: Your character can be saved, but not the world state. I speak, of course, of *Dungeon Siege*. When you restart a multiplayer game, your character encounters the same conversations, is presented with the same quests, and carries around the same useless quest items, even though she's already done all of this 20 times before.
- My last pet peeve isn't really a peeve so much as it is a plea: Please, please let's have more games that offer co-op play. I personally don't care if the A.I. sucks, if the game isn't balanced in co-op mode, or whatever other silly excuse a developer may have. Multiplayer co-op gaming is as much about the social experience as it is about the gameplay. *Serious Sam* was a somewhat uninteresting, repetitive shooter in single-player mode. Playing co-op, though, was an absolute blast. Let's see more of that.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

Tech Medics

You've got questions; Wil is pathetic By William O'Neal

Does anyone really watch DVD movies on their PC?

I'm looking into buying a new PC and wanted to ask about DVD drives. Why would I want one? Am I missing the killer app? I have no desire to plop down in front of my PC to watch a movie. Are games going to be released in DVD format soon? What's the compelling reason to spend money and an expansion slot on a DVD drive? Thanks and have a happy Easter—though I don't want to read about the O'Neal family Easter egg hunt in the next issue.

Steven

Great letter! I agree with you about DVD drives—I think they're pointless for most people. Years ago, there was talk of releasing games on DVD, but I haven't heard much about it recently. If I were buying a machine right now, I'd just get a really good CD-RW drive.

Some PCs go "Woo-WOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

I'm looking to get an Ultimate x5 computer from ABS. I was just wondering if you've ever tested these computers. If so, I want to know how loud they are. Currently, I have an HP Pavilion, which runs louder than I'd like. My ears ring for a short time after using it! Thanks for your time, and keep up the great job at *CGW*.

Richard Carpenter

While rigs from other manufacturers have been noticeably loud, I've never found ABS machines to be particularly noisy. This highlights a couple of points: 1) I haven't rated machines on how loud they are, and 2) because I haven't noticed how loud an ABS machine is, you can take that to mean they aren't too loud.

We need better fact checkers. Hell, we just need fact checkers!

In your June 2003 issue (#227), you stated that the ATI Radeon 9800 Pro costs $300. Well, first I thought it was a misprint, but I also noticed that the Review section listed the same price (page 113). It clearly says the price is $300. If this is true and not a misprint, can you tell me where you bought the Radeon 9800 Pro for $300? If it's a misprint, can you tell me, so my soul can rest? By the way, good magazine.

That was the crack. The Radeon 9800 Pro is $400. The 9700 Pro is $300. Sorry, dude.

Suckling at the government teat

What kind of machine should I put together to run Alias Wavefront's *Maya* software (I'm going to school to learn computer animation and modeling)? Should I get dual or single CPUs? What about videocard configurations and so on? Also, would you recommend a particular company from which I should buy said system (Alienware, Voodoo, Falcon NW, etc.)? I know there is an nForce motherboard (powered by Nvidia), but will it work only with Nvidia-based graphics cards, or will it also work with, for example, the ATI Radeon 9800?

Eric

While I've never used *Maya*, I'd suggest getting a machine with at least the following: 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB) processor, 1GB of DDR 400 memory, either a 256MB Radeon 9800 Pro or 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (NV35) graphics card, and a RAID configuration. As for who to buy the machine from, any of the companies you mention will be able to hook you up, although I suspect that Alienware can offer you the best price. I spoke to a friend who works at Nvidia, and he told me that while the nForce1 and nForce2 don't support dual CPUs, the nForce3 will. Of course, Nforce3 motherboards won't be available for a while. Also, nForce mobos work with any graphics card.

Stick with what works

Why does Motherboards.org rate the Gigabyte board as the best board to use with an Intel chip, while you continue to stick with an Intel motherboard? Is there something I'm missing?

Bob

Not really. I stick with Intel motherboards because, while they may not be the fastest around, they're plenty solid, and I've never had any problems with them. If a few extra frames per second is worth it to you, then feel free to go with Gigabyte boards. I know that many of the boutique system builders use them, which speaks volumes about their quality.

ILLUSTRATION BY SUPERCORP

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming machine By William O'Neal

I was going to start off by saying that a reviewer's life is never easy. Then I realized that...well...it actually is. When your day's decisions revolve around which top-notch 256MB graphics card to put in a machine you just built–ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra–you're gonna be hard pressed to find a sympathetic ear. I'm sure, however, that critical words will be flying faster that the proverbial turd that pervaded the fan. Ya' heard?!

Tests seem to show that the two cards mentioned above are pretty darn close to each other, performance-wise. But because I got the GeForce FX first, I dec ded to build this month's Power Rig with that card. These cards are so close that many reviewers–including Dave Salvator–are calling this match a draw. With the exception of the graphics card, I only changed one other component on my Power Rig: the soundcard. Since cash is, in theory, no object with the Power Rig, I dropped Creative's Audigy 2 Platinum EX in. The breakout box adds nifty features like S/PDIF and optical audio-out.

My Lean Machine is the same as last month's: AMD's Athlon XP 2200+ is so cheap that it's practically free, and that nForce2 motherboard is awesome. Be sure to come back next month, as I'm considering upping the graphics card power in the Lean Machine. That should make Ken Brown happy.

The cards are so close that many reviewers–including Dave Salvator–are calling this match a draw.

3GHZ PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operat ng system	Windows XP Professional Ed tion	$300
Processor	Intel 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	$700
Case	Antec PlusView 1000AMG	$100
Power Supply	Antec True Blue 480 (480 watts)	$100
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ with Intel 875P chipset	$180
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX KHX3500 PC3500 DDR	$350
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 240GB RAID array	$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Platinum EX	$200
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo 20x/10x/40-12Ax DVD/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	22-inch NEC MultiSync FE211SB	$600
Speakers	Cambridge MegaWorks 6100	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$55
TOTAL		$3,960

3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200)

3DGameGauge 3.0 (1280x960)

ATHLON XP 2200+ LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Ed t on	$200
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	$125
Case	Antec Lanboy (300-watt SmartBlue power supply included)	$100
Power supply	N/A	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (nForce2)	$140
Memory	512MB Corsair XMS PC-3200 DDR	$150
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra	$150
Soundcard	Onboard nForce2 5 1 Audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sony DVD-ROM drive	$40
Monitor	19-inch ViewSonic E90fb	$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire 2.1 2500	$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$45
TOTAL		$1,325

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD [illegible]

Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less! Edited by Dana Jongewaard

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield

Ready...set...attack!

PAGE 102

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's Dirty Trick is for *MechWarrior Total War*.

Here's a way you can steal provinces from your allies! First, find a [illegible] you want and make sure [illegible] of Catholics in it. If not, [illegible] bishop to convert the popu[illegible] there are enough converts, send in an inquisitor. Soon an inquisition will run rampant through the territory and the peasants will be very unhappy. Hopefully, a rebellion will be sparked when the rebels conquer said territory, bribe them with an emissary to fight for you. You have just successfully stolen both a territory and an army from your allies.

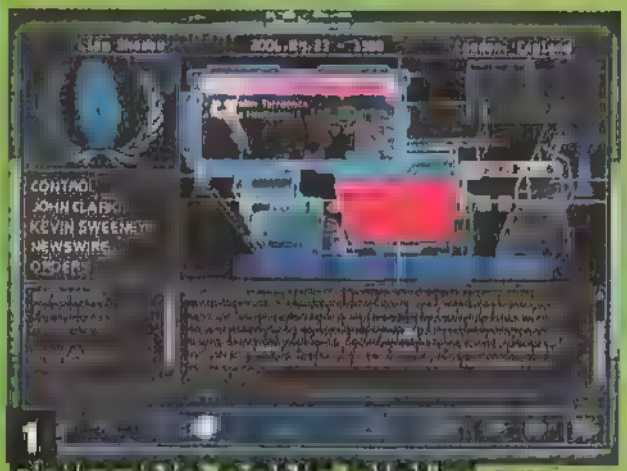
—Steven Palmer

WIN

How To...

RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD

Pentagon envy: planning the perfect mission **By Raphael Liberatore**



1

BRIEFING DONE RIGHT

Begin with the Briefing Room, where Control provides a detailed overview of the operation. Control members offer tactical analysis, terrorist background, mission objectives, and various news wire reports. Pay attention to the type of mission and mission objectives that your operatives must perform.

The Briefing Room also offers a 3D view of the mission map, where various tension zones are highlighted for review. Study the location of tension zones, enemy emplacements, and preferred routes for securing mission objectives. Operation: Lion Shadow encompasses straightforward COB objectives: You'll need to eliminate terrorists and keep them from destroying records while rescuing hostages. By understanding these particular objectives, you'll better ascertain which operatives, how many teams, and which weapons and equipment are required.

THERE IS NO "I" IN TEAM

2

The Gear Room is where you pick operatives and equipment and assign them to teams. Create red, green, and gold teams for the best possible combination. Assign assaulters to two teams with an additional team containing a sniper and another assaulter. Make sure the sniper has a high Leadership score. A demolitions expert should accompany the red assault team for that extra punch when breaching vault doors. All three teams should contain an operative who has been promoted to the top position and has a high Leadership score. Ding Chavez is the best operative and should be used primarily as your POV character.

Planning *Raven Shield* missions like a professional takes plenty of intelligence, the right mix of gear, and loads of patience. We all know shooting skills are important, but what good is taking out tangos if you indiscriminately kill innocent hostages in the process? To avoid this casualty of war, it's important to fully understand *Raven Shield*'s Briefing, Gear, and Planning Rooms before inserting steps into a mission. Let's study Operation: Lion Shadow, a classic hostage rescue mission, for instruction. As we engage, terrorists have seized a bank with the intent to destroy critical documents. Thwart this act of terrorism by planning the perfect mission and successfully carrying it out.

USED GEAR FOR SALE

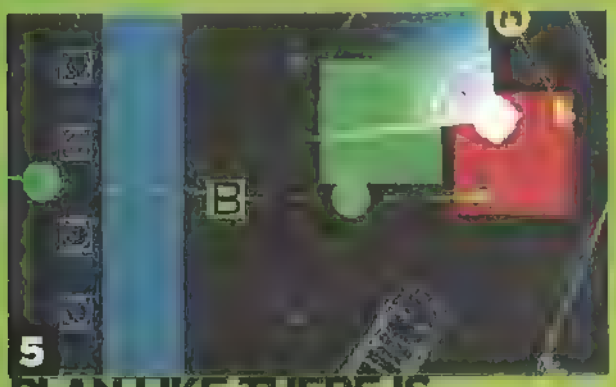
3

Since Operation: Lion Shadow is a daytime urban operation, choosing a camouflaged dark uniform with medium to heavy body armor is the best way to go. While lighter body armor may allow operatives to react more quickly, heavier armor will afford more protection in the tight spaces where firefights may be encountered inside the bank. Also, take along a heartbeat sensor to get a handle on terrorists' locations.

4

WEAPONS "R" US

Weapons selection should be tailored to mission type. Since Operation: Lion Shadow requires rescuing hostages in close quarters, you'll want to provide your teams with silenced submachine guns like the MP5SD5, MTAR-21, and P90. All three weapons are excellent submachine guns for COB. Silenced weapons are best used for hostage rescue ops since they limit the number of bad guys you alert. Load up the team with silenced pistols like the USP .40 cal or Barretta 92FS. You'll also want to take along plenty of flash-bangs, which are a necessity for clearing rooms in COB. Not only will they temporarily blind terrorists as your team storms each room, but you run less risk of accidentally killing hostages. Have operatives from each team carry smoke grenades, breaching charges, and tear gas in their second item slots. Smoke grenades cover your team's movement, while tear gas will temporarily subdue terrorists. Make sure you equip your sniper with the PSG-1 or M82A1. Bullet types can also play a vital role depending on the terrain. Go with FMJ rounds for primary weapons since the bad guys will probably be wearing body armor as well.

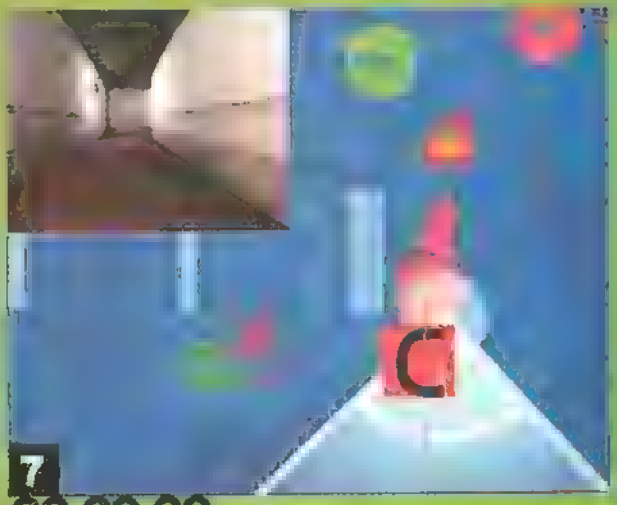


5 PLAN LIKE THERE IS NO TOMORROW

Raven Shield's heart and soul takes p ace in the Planning Room. It's here that you plant the seeds for future fruition or utter fai ure. Study the map and search for terrorist posit ons, choke points, entry points, exit po nts, hostage locat ons, and special objectives. Fam liarize yourse f with planning icons and camera commands. Keep your teams in balance by covering threat areas with sn pers and/or overwatch teams wh le moving teams into position. Make sure you coordi nate team advances on each objective with simi ar waypoints, Go codes, and rule of engagement (ROE) speeds so teams remain fluid and active using the same commands. Planning the perfect miss on takes pra ice and, above al, pat ence so make sure you al ocate considerable t me for the plann ng phase.

6 INSERT HERE

Raven Shield's defau t mission plans are extremely well thought out. The default plan is a fantastic tool to utilize if you're having problems understanding the dynamics of planning. Study it and learn from it. Fol ow team waypo nts and Go codes for better clarity on seizing objectives. The Observat on mode is a so useful for uncover ng weak areas n your p an. If you're having problems with the mission, the default plan can be tweaked and modif ed to fit your needs. The Planning Room a so offers a 3D v ew of the area of operation, which can be launched by select ng one of the teams and hit ng the Play icon. The 3D camera will show the appropriate team's route in the upper-left corner of the Planning Room map. Return to the Planning Room and make adjustments where you or your computer-contro led teams strugg e, h t bot tlenecks or suffer casualties. Through trial and error, you'l develop a cohesive and ultimately successful plan.



7 GO GO GO

Make sure you look over each team's route with the idea of notating grenade orders. Some teams may be ordered to utilize a specific grenade at a precise location on the map. Don't forget to utilize flash-bangs to disorient enemies or toss a frag grenade to wound or elimi nate pesky terrorists. In crowded rooms, add a breaching charge order to assist the computer-controlled team past enemy defenses. Keep an eye on waypoints, ROE, and Go codes. ROE should be set at Assault where your team will fire at will. Go codes are an integral mission order and should not be treated lightly. Most of the time, it's best to order Go codes only when all teams are in posit on and can move into act on simultaneously. Other times, it may be more advantageous to ignore one particular Go code in order to el minate a nearby terrorist before order ng the Go code to your other teams. If one team has a breach order, consider tossing a flash-bang grenade into the same room. Always order Go codes immediately after grenades explode. The Hold command is also important; don't hesitate to use it. Sometimes, it's necessary to keep the other teams in posit on while you scout ahead or e iminate a particular threat. Be patient.

8 OBJECTIVE OVERRIDE

Remember, your mission is to liberate the bank, rescue the three hostages, and prevent the destruction of valuable financ al records. These terrorists are well armed and prepared to defend themselves at all costs. Set your weapons to semi or full auto and stay alert. Use the heartbeat sensor when unsure of possible terrorist posit ons. You can a so jump from team to team if necessary.

SHADOWBANE

It builds character

The center of any MMORPG is, of course, your character. *Shadowbane*'s dozens of occupations and disciplines all stem from four basic classes: fighters, rogues, healers, and mages. While most options aren't open to characters under Level 10, the way you develop your character in this initial stage will impact your character for the rest of its existence and may cripple you severely if you choose the wrong options. *Shadowbane* is very unforgiving, and you'll never get a poorly spent ability point back.

You should, of course, study any race carefully before choosing it, since the race affects basic abilities quite a bit and may also restrict the classes open to you. Only Humans, for example, can be confessors, while Minotaurs are restricted to fighters.

Once you've chosen your race, you must adjust your attributes. You may subtract up to five points from any ability to use as you see fit. Take advantage of this and put these points into your character's primary attributes. For fighters, this is strength or constitution, rogues want dexterity, and spellcasters should get intelligence. Generally, all of the attributes that aren't primary to your class should be lowered. Intelligence is the only exception, as it affects the maximum level of all your skills, making it important for every class to have its intelligence at an average or better level.

Additionally, you can add traits to your characters. While this can be useful, you should never overindulge. Your character only has a limited amount of space for rune stones, and each trait takes up a slot. You'll need these slots later to augment your abilities. The traits you should focus most on are the runes that increase your primary attribute or special abilities like ambidexterity, which grants fighters the ability to use dual weapons.

Fighter

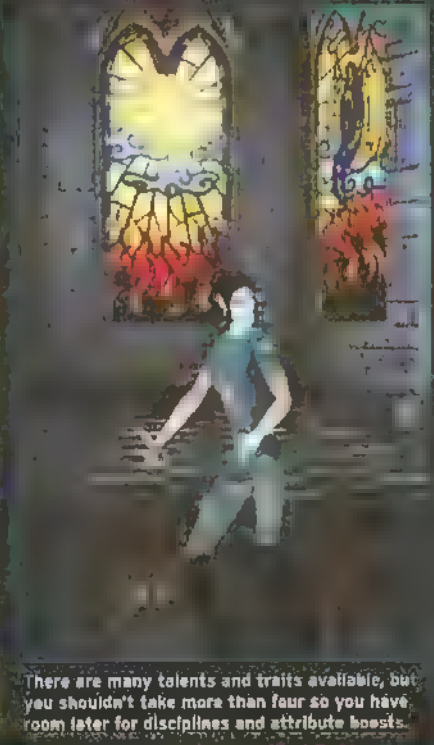
The backbone of any army, fighters are also the most newbie-friendly class. All you really need is a good weapon, some armor, and lots of muscle, and you're ready to charge in and hack away. Decide on what kind of fighter you want to be from the start, though. If you wish to be the tank at the forefront of every battle, you should focus on strength and constitution. Most melee weapons are not modified by dexterity, so you can usually ignore this stat. Conversely, warriors who rely on finesse and missile weapons should concentrate on dexterity since it helps in dodging as well as the missiles. Centaurs, Dwarves, Half-Giants, and Minotaurs are all good race choices for this class.

Rogue

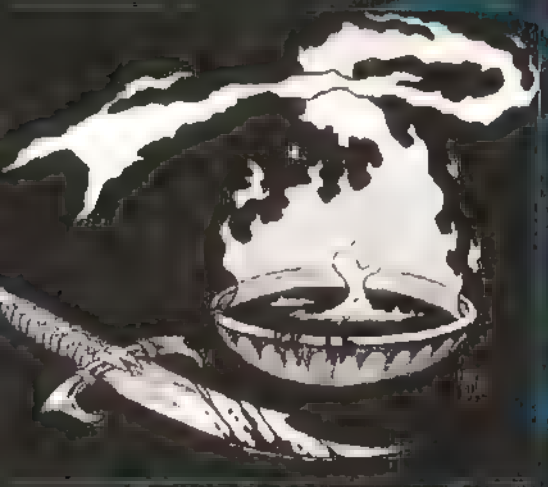
Rogues in *Shadowbane* can be quite effective. With a high dexterity, they can dodge most attacks, wield a weapon in each hand, and backstab enemies with devastating effect. Since player killing and guild wars are common, assassins and thieves can have a grand ol' time stealing and ambushing the opposition. Rogues can also become scouts who focus on hunting down the thieving scum

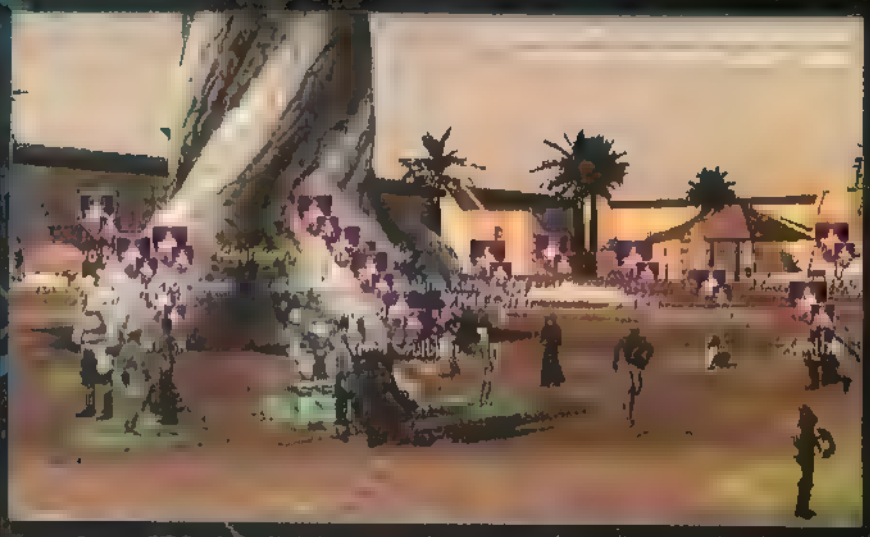
Fighters are tough and can take down huge beasties by themselves. It's still inefficient, though.

The healer class is quite flexible. Although it lacks the punch of a fighter, many have the staying ability to be a secondary tank.



There are many talents and traits available, but you shouldn't take more than four so you have room later for disciplines and attribute boosts.





of *Shadowbane* and act as the eyes and ears of their groups.

Mage

With the mage, it's all about intelligence. Everything from your skills to the damage you can inflict depends upon it. Make Intelligence as high as possible, and you're halfway to a successful character. Mages are violent spellcasters, and many focus on ranged spells that damage or hinder the opposition. Being able to lob massive amounts of damage from afar earns them the nickname of "nuker." With the lowest number of hit points, mages should always have some support in combat.

Healer

Healers are the rarest yet most indispensable class. They keep a group alive, provide buffs that increase everyone's abilities, and are invaluable in support. They do lack damage-dealing ability, though, and are thus very difficult to solo with. That said, you can usually count on finding a group in desperate need of a healer's attention. Healers should also focus on Intelligence, since it determines the outcome of their spells. A few healer classes, such as the crusader and confessor, do focus on combat. These healers should have decent Strength and Constitution while serving in their second-line combat duties.

Road map to success

Levels 1-5: *Shadowbane* is one of the fastest games in which to level up, and it should only take an hour or so for the first five levels. Outside of every village are spawn points for low-level fodder like snakes, spiders, and lizard men. Get yourself a group and pick on them. Focus your points on upgrading your primary stats and save up your money for training. You won't need to buy equipment for a while yet. The monsters around the towns are so pitiful that you can even solo this part, although it generally takes a bit longer to level up.

Levels 6-10: Things will get a bit more interesting after Level 5. You'll find that it takes way too long to level up if you continue to sit around town. Start hunting for bandit and grobold groups, which are located in the northern and central parts of the island respectively. Camp those spawn points and watch your experience increase. Focus on your primary stat, and once you max it out, move on to the next most important one for your class.

Stick to the snakes, spiders, and lizards when you first get started. Anything tougher, and you'll be looking for your corpse regularly.

When training your skills, remember that *Shadowbane* has a soft cap. While you can technically train a skill to as high a level as your Intelligence allows, it is often impractical due to pricing issues. After you've reached a skill level at which the game items are suitable for your character's current level, the training price will jump astronomically. Unless you have a lot of money donated by friends, just wait till you level up to keep training.

Levels 11-20: This is when you set your character's eventual path. At Level 10, you can pick a profession for your class. There are dozens of possibilities, and the *Shadowbane*

manual is pretty worthless at describing what they actually do. Head over to the *Shadowbane* forum at shadowbane.ubi.com—people there seem to be a lot more knowledgable than the manual.

In the lower levels of Rank 1, you should stick to fighting bandits until they become "blue" for you. You should then head to the Bogs. These can be quite tough, and there is even the occasional Rank 3 monster in this area. Make sure you have a good group with you since dying now actually penalizes you more than just making you drop your stuff.

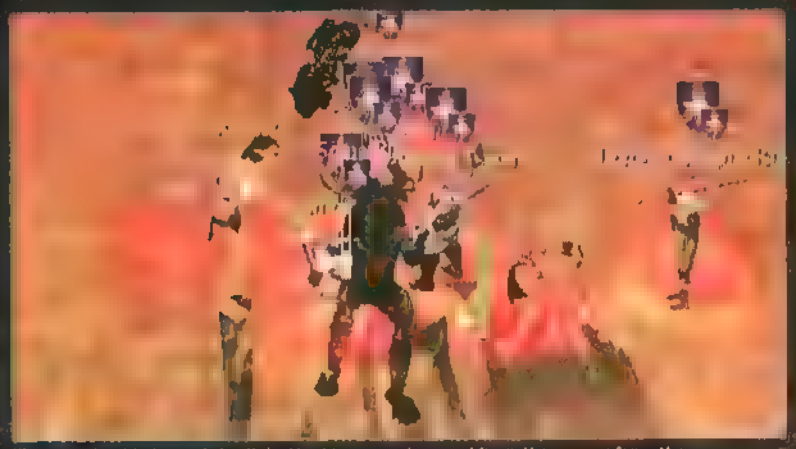
Levels 21-30: It's time to start playing with the big boys. Once you reach Rank 2, you'll be forced to pledge your allegiance to one of the cities outside of the newbie island. When you get there, you need to be careful since the safety zone that protected the newbie island no longer applies. Player killing becomes rampant, and thieves and assassins wait around every corner to prey on hapless newbies. Unless you're a really tough fighter, try not to wander outside of the cities by yourself.

The city you choose also dictates what you fight and what items you get. I personally prefer Khar, since there is a large variety of creatures to fight and the city's layout is relatively simple, unlike the mess that is King's Crossing.

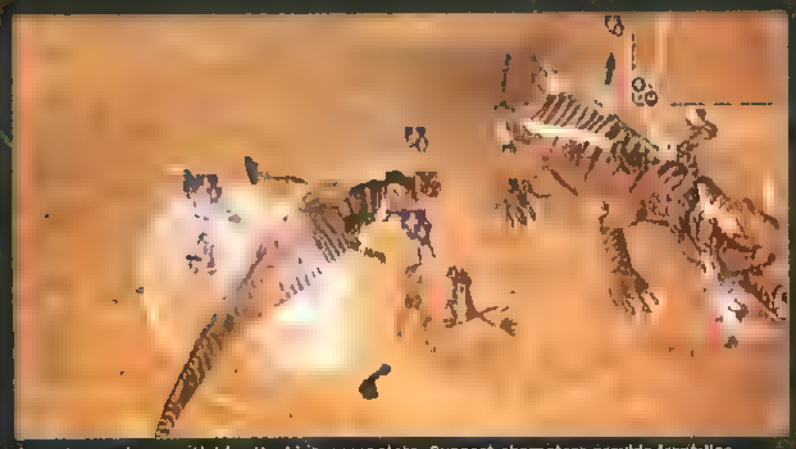
The monsters that you can fight for experience here are too varied to list, but as a general rule, it's never a good idea to fight monsters more than a rank higher than your current level unless you have a group to back you up. Of course, soloing is the most ineffective method of leveling up anyway, so antisocial types should either give up or swallow their hatred of fellow gamers.

You should also lay down the groundwork of your future here. Network a bit, find possible guilds to join, and figure out what powerful runes you might want to buy. Runes will give you access to new disciplines and skills, and they increase your maximum abilities. They are quite pricey, however, and can range into the hundreds of thousands in gold.

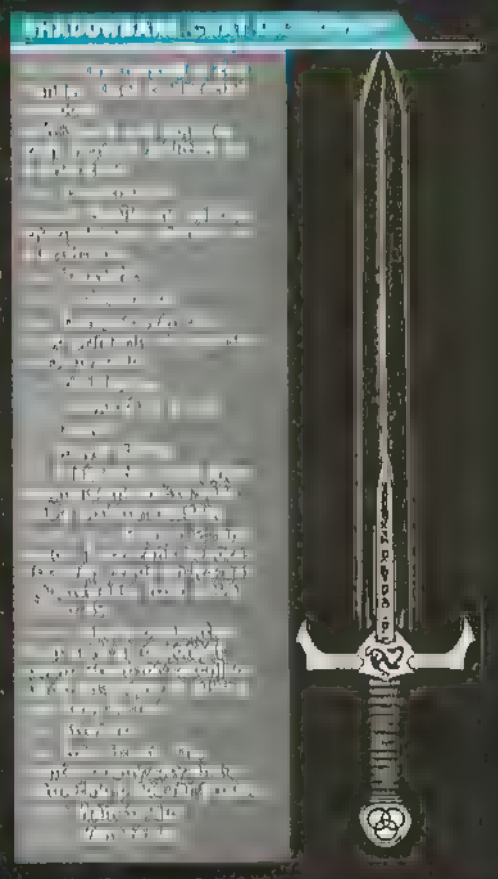
When you finally make it to Rank 3, it's time to join a guild and take part in the more interesting parts of *Shadowbane*. The regular cities don't have trainers that'll be of much use to you by this point, so players who continue to focus on mindless monster hunting will find their growth stunted. Besides, why play a game about guilds and wars if all you want to do is camp a spawn point?



Fighters should always interdict attacking monsters and keep them away from the spellcasters. Taunt and run if necessary.



A good group is essential for the bigger monsters. Support characters provide front-line troops with a variety of buffs to increase survivability.



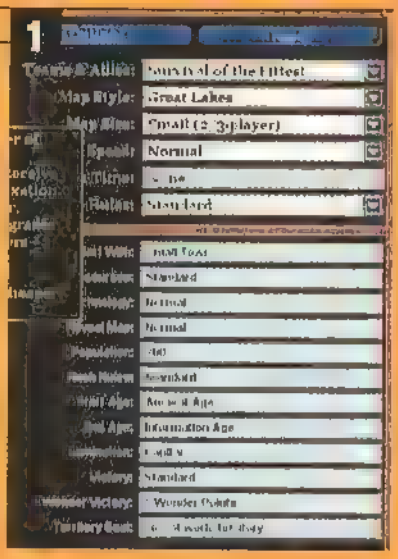
How To...

RISE OF NATIONS

The best way to play the first 10 minutes of *Rise of Nations* **By Di Luo**

Rise of Nations, like most other RTS games, is a game of economics and strategy rather than battles and tactics. While it focuses a bit more on tactical acumen (with factors such as flanking damage), a stronger economy will still win the war in the end. To help you become competitive with the RTS fiends out there, here are a few steps to follow.

1 TEAMS



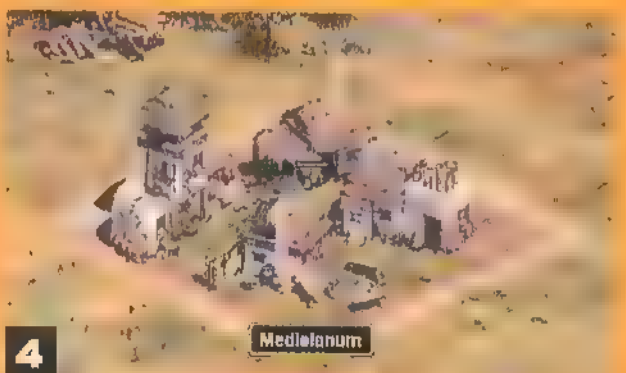
When choosing a team, a lot of your decision depends on the map choice, although some nations are definitely better than others depending on your style of play. Aztecs gain resources from slaying enemies, which gives an edge in rushing/holding battles early on. The Japanese are also good for rushing since they have good unique units in the earlier ages, create barracks units more cheaply, and also get food production bonuses. Mongols are great for raiding but don't have the lasting power of some other nations. Germans not only have a long list of unique units from the Classical to Information Age, but they also gain economic bonuses for all their cities, making them equally competent in peace and war. The British are also a good choice due to good taxation rates, which reward an economic game. They have a good complement of units and bonuses for their defensive structures. The Spanish are great for early exploration and controlling the oceans. On a map full of islands, they can dominate territorially, but they require a good economy to churn out units due to their lackluster military. The Egyptians, Romans, Chinese, Mayans, and Koreans are all good defensive civilizations. Most of them have either economic bonuses or can build forts and towers cheaply. They favor a slow approach and wars of attrition where they expand their borders slowly while building up huge economies.

2 BREED

Once in the game, the first thing you should do is select your initial city and hit Shift-V to start a building queue of five peasants. Unless you're the Koreans, who get peasants for free at the start, you'll need to churn these out in droves to build up your economy quickly. Falling behind in the initial few minutes can doom your entire game.

3 RESEARCH

A handy shortcut is the L key, which takes you directly to the library. You'll find that you need to visit this place often. Always research science first. This lowers the cost for other research and increases the benefits of exploring ruins. Obtaining the result of ruin finds in the beginning is essential in building your empire. Next, you should research civics to build a new city quickly, followed by economics to increase your commerce cap. Military and age advances can wait until you're maxing out on your population cap, unless you're fighting off rushers who come at you early and often.



4 BUILD

Your initial city will always start with farms and lumber production. With your first batch of peasants, build up to the maximum number of farms and fill up the lumber slots. These two resources are the game's basic building blocks, and you can never have too much of them. You should also build a temple, a market, and some caravans as soon as possible to generate wealth, an important resource after the first age. Iron can wait slightly longer unless you're fighting off rushers.

5 EXPLORE

Don't forget to send your scout exploring. If you find yourself overwhelmed, use the auto-explore feature. It's not as efficient as using waypoints (hold down Shift and right click to do so), but it's one less thing for you to worry about. You need to explore to find ruins, unique resources, and enemy cities. Ruins give you the resource that you have the least of, so it's sometimes wise to hold off your explorer until your most desired resource is the lowest of the lot.

6 EXPAND

The national borders play an important role in *Rise*. They provide wealth through taxation, inflict attrition damage on your opponents, and limit where your opponents can build. Also, farms are limited to five per city except for the Egyptians, so you'll need quite a few cities to support a large army, especially in landlocked maps without fishing. You should expand to three or four cities as quickly as possible.

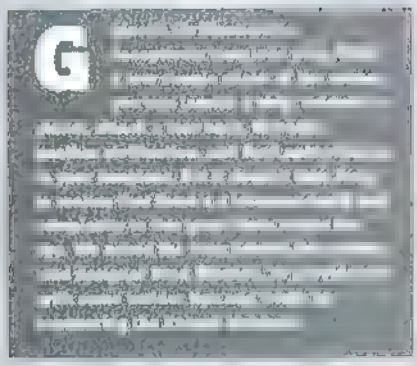
7 DEFEND

While towers aren't particularly powerful, it's good to have at least one at some point during the game. You can only research attrition technology as here, and they are quite useful in limiting your opponents attack routes. You'll also need to build barracks and stables early on so you can generate units in case of an attack. The economic and military models in *Rise* are designed to [illegible] so you should never neglect either mounted or [illegible] good bonuses in one or the other.

8 ATTACK

Unless you're after a completely peaceful victory, it's not a bad idea to send some raiding units out early. Opponents often become paranoid and defensive if a few of your probes come close to doing real damage. If they're busy building forts and looking after their bases, you'll have time to expand your borders without much opposition.

GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS

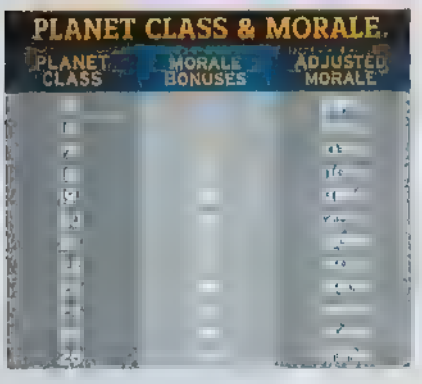


You can please all of the people some of the time.

The citizens in *Galactic Civilizations* are ungrateful. And while you may eventually take the path of reeducating them to be more appreciative of your excellence, you'll still have to put up with their unreasonable demands for food and shelter and services.

The good news is, the better the planet, the easier it is (initially) to have happy people. Our experiments have led us to conclude that people generally are happier when they live in a nice place than when they live on a hellish ice ball. *Galactic Civilizations* has dozens of planet classes; however, the first 14 planet classes are basically useless (see "hellish ice ball" above) without serious terraforming efforts. Earth-like planets tend to range between classes 15 and 19. Planets above class 19 have citizen morale so high that they're hard to describe. So we won't. (See Planet Class & Morale chart.)

Of course, not everything is perfect in happy

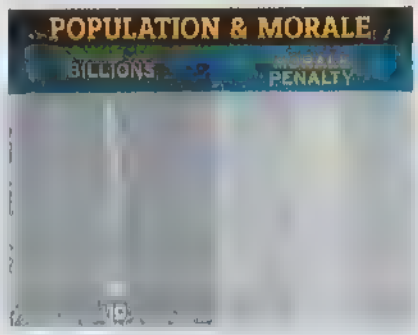


land. Your citizens want stuff. And you can build stuff that makes them happy. An entertainment center, for instance, will increase your base rating by 20 percent. However people don't like to share their space. So while feeding them aphrodisiacs to get the population up seems like a good idea at first, you may soon find people grumbling about the crowding. (See Population & Morale chart.) Planets will stop increasing in population when morale hits around 55 percent. So to get beyond a couple billion people, even on a nice planet, you'll need to build stuff.

There is another way to really tick people off: taxes. People get really whiny when you tax them too much. (See Tax Rate & Morale chart.)

There are other factors that affect morale: your civilization's morale ability (which you can

The difference in how you're treated when you're strong and when you're weak. (Strong is a lot more fun.)

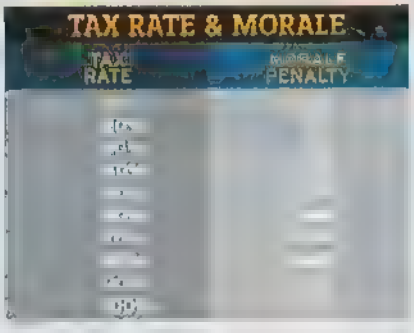


set at the beginning of the game), building up morale galactic resources, propaganda, destabilization, being in debt, and unique events unique to that planet. But these three factors are the main ones to focus on in your attempt to keep your people happy.

Can't we all just get along? No

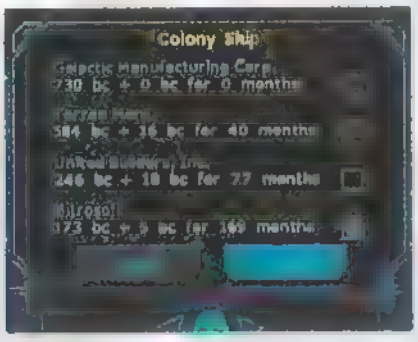
You've brought the human race into the 23rd century and are minding your own business when the Drengin Empire announces that it needs your civilization's carcasses to power its death furnaces. Was it something you said?

Your diplomatic relations in *Galactic*



Civilizations are based upon these main factors:

+ **Military might** It's more complex than a direct comparison. A master diplomat can have a weak military, but avoid war by using



In the early race to colonize good planets, you can't afford the time to build colony ships—take advantage of leasing.

The minor races are a good source of income—surely they'd never use these capital ships on the humans...

MORALE TIP

To win an election, you really need only half the population to like you. Don't get obsessed with high morale ratings. As long as 50 percent of the people like you, don't sweat it. It can be tempting to lower taxes temporarily to boost approval ratings with the people, but remember, people come to expect ever-increasing entitlements. So don't lower taxes and then jack them back up unless you're prepared for some very unhappy people!

RELATIONS TIP

Go for trade first and then immediately for Deflector technology so you can build defenders. The combination of a decent defense and active trading can help you avoid war early in the game.

diplomatic skills to keep everyone else at war. If the Drengin are starting to get nasty with you, use diplomacy to try to get other powers to go to war with them. The Drengin will ignore you when Altarian and Torrian dreadnoughts start parking in their backyard.

✣ **Trade more** Trade with a civilization equals better relations. If half the Drengin's economy is based on trade with you, they're going to think twice about going to war with you. You can build up your trade with a given civilization by enhancing starbases on your trade ships' paths.

✣ **Morality** Being evil in *Galactic Civilizations* may seem like the easy path, but it makes life tougher diplomatically. Become too evil, and the good races may seek regime change on Earth. Evil races tend not to get along that great with one another either, but they won't hold it against you. They also won't generally go out of their way to destroy good.

✣ **Tactical situation** The A.I. is designed to play like a human and it knows the human tricks of the trade. Build up a force by their planets, and they'll take notice and possibly preemptively attack you. Same with offensive star bases.

✣ **Cultural misunderstanding** If you don't spy on a race, you won't know their traditions either. This increases the odds of a diplomatic incident.

There's more than one way to skin a Drengin

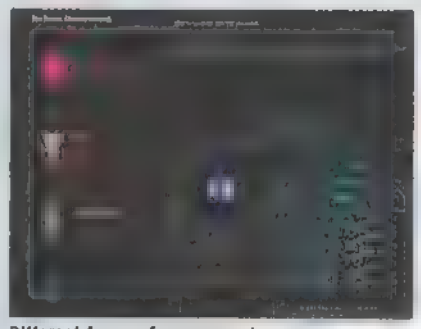
Every strategy game that comes out tends to boast multiple paths to victory. Then you play it and discover that every path but conquest is tedious to the point of wanting to go back and reread Vogon poetry.

But *GalCiv* is different—really! You not only have conquest, but you also have the political, technological, and cultural paths to victory. Here are tips on how to win via each one.

✣ **Conquest** Kill lots of stuff.

✣ **Cultural** If you can get 90 percent of the sectors to be under your influence and remain at peace with the living civilizations, you win. Gain control of influence galactic resources and build star bases throughout the galaxy with cultural magnification modules on them. There are several wonders that can greatly enhance your cultural influence as well. Follow communication theory to interstellar business, and down that path is the mother lode of influence technologies.

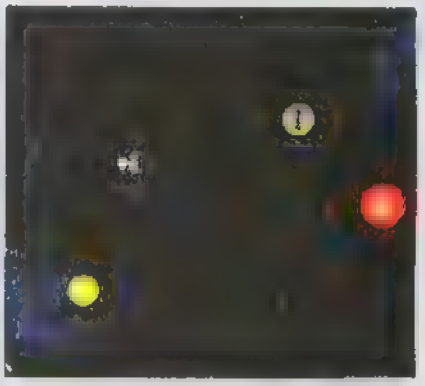
✣ **Technology** The key here is to keep everyone at peace with you. Ironically, to win this way, you need to combine your diplomacy skills with your technology skills. The reason: Even if you remain at peace with everyone, one civilization will eventually conquer the others in the time it takes to become a Vorlon-like being. And at that point, you'll be next no matter what. Your challenge is to maintain a balance of power in the galaxy. Send ships and money and technologies to whichever civilizations seem to



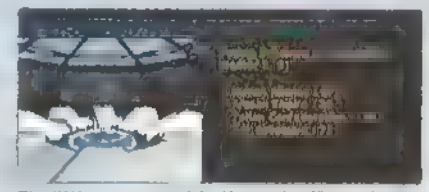
Different forms of government can increase production, but at the cost of making it more difficult to keep everyone happy.

Setting your tax rate too low (such that morale is more than 50 percent) is a waste of resources.

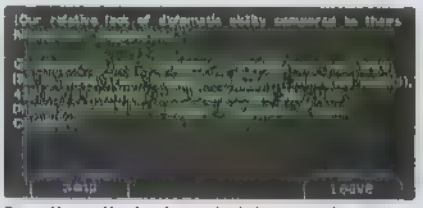
"OK, we're trading with the Torrians, who are war with the Drengin, but we're friends with the Drengin and at war with the Arceans, but the Arceans are friends with both the Torrians and the Drengins." Diplomacy can be very tricky in *Galactic Civilizations*.



To have a chance of winning, you must find and take resources and inhabitable planets faster than your rivals do.



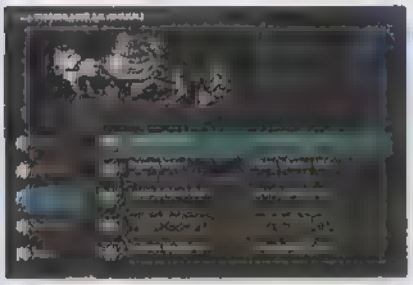
The little square next to the sector ID number will show you the civilization influence points for that sector.



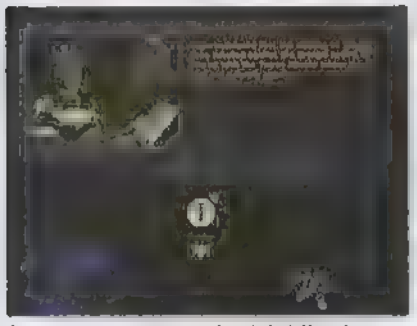
Sometimes the best way to take care of enemies is to bribe someone else to do it for you.

Evil and smart: You'll have to keep a sharp eye on these guys.

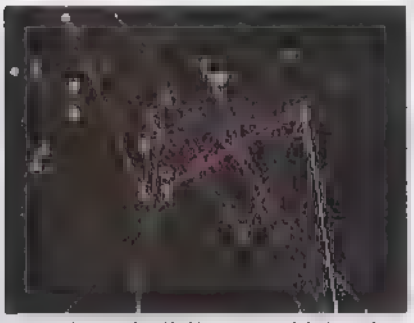
Propaganda can be an effective way to convince your people just how great they have it.



Galactic waterparks and shopping malls can convince other races of the superiority of Human culture.



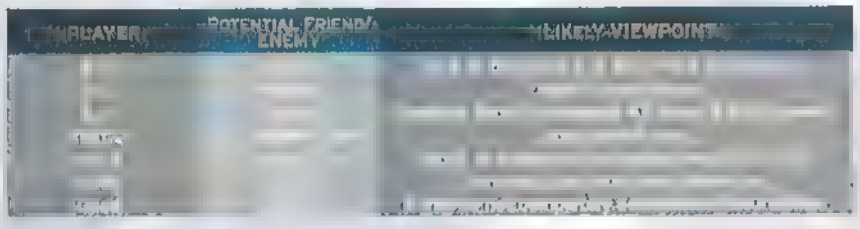
Sure, you can conquer a planet, but there's a special satisfaction in having them voluntarily defect due to your cultural superiority.

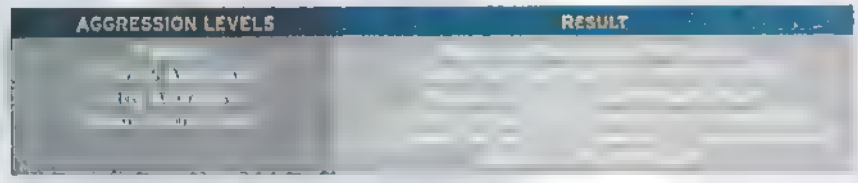


Battleships and Death Stars are cool, but good trade routes are critical to any successful dynasty.

ONLINE GOODIES Modding up the game. You can create your own techs, ships, United Planets resolutions, events, and more, and then submit them to the GalCiv.com library. Visit www.galciv.com/forum.asp?BIBSBM to learn how to make your own mods.

The other civilizations won't idly sit by while you invade their space with starbases.





be losing against stronger ones so that they al remain viable for as long as possible. You wil want to make sure you control the technology-enhancing galactic resources and build them up. Use your diplomacy to give capital ships to the enemy of anyone who happens to control a technology resource.

+ **Political** This path is much harder than it first seems. Get all races to ally with you and you win. Easy enough. Except that in order to do that, you need their diplomatic relations with you to be "close." This requires an immense amount of trade and the occasional "gift" to their ambassador. Having a decent-size military helps as well. You will need Alliances technology to do this. Building up trade will require careful planning of your trade routes. Don't just randomly send your freighters out there; pick a path that will be easy to follow up with a line of star bases with trade enhancing modules. Make sure your freighter goes to a planet with a high population and comes from a planet with high population.

Before you start the game, have an idea about which path you want to take. But don't count on your starting abilities to be enough to make your victory preordained.

Good and evil

Humans start out as neutral civilizations. The game has a scale from 1 (demonic) to 100 (angelic). Pure neutral is 50. Different events will occur during the course of the game, in which your actions will tilt you one way or another. For instance, converting excess population to food stuffs would be considered an evil action.

One key thing to keep in mind is that no one said good guys never perform any military action. Look back through history and remember at least one time that a "good guy" sent military forces to some far-off place for regime change or...whatever. If the regime is evil, it greatly increases their odds for military action, but even if they are good, military action can happen depending on the aggression level. To find out the aggression level of a given alien civilization, click on the info button on the negotiation screen.

Sulu, set a course for home

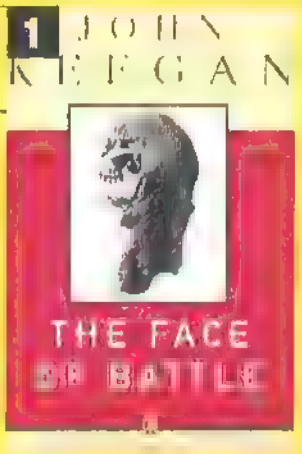
As you can see, becoming the head pooh-bah of the galaxy can be a tricky undertaking. For even more tips, tricks, and insults, head on over to www.galciv.com.

THE ART OF WAR AND THE JOHN TILLER GAME OF THE MONTH

By Di Luo

You've seen the reviews, you've seen the screenshots, and you must be wondering how even our intrepid reviewers can wade through so many titles without committing hari kari. Here are a few tips to help you in the latest generation of hex-based wargaming.

1 ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LOGISTICS



Get a book. If you like get a military history book to set the mood, but definitely get a book. Or turn on the TV, or the radio, or a game of solitaire. Anything really, as long as it distracts you enough to keep you from falling asleep and damaging your keyboard with a badly placed headbutt. When playing larger scenarios, each turn will take the A.I. 30 minutes or more to move its units back and forth with the purpose of a drunkard fresh off a merry-go-round.

2 ON THE VALUE OF HOPE

Hopeless causes are good things. Unlike real life, where all you'll get is a bullet in the head or years in a Russian POW camp, forlorn hopes are the only way to keep a Tiller game against the A.I. interesting. Pick the most lopsided scenario possible and take the weaker side. Since your enemy has the tactical acumen of a rock, it will never press its advantage. You can spend the next few hours target practicing and picking its army apart piecemeal. It's not particularly entertaining except for alternate history buffs who want to brag about routing a Russian corps with one SS division.

3 ON THE VALUE OF FRIENDS

If you're one of the lucky few who actually has friends brave enough to venture into the obscure world of wargaming, the Tiller games can be fun. While most games can be played by e-mail or through a direct TCP/IP connect, you're better off with the PBEM, since few people have the patience to sit around for the hours needed for even the smallest of scenarios. Be warned that this breed is nearly as rare as a good *Star Trek* game. Indeed, this writer will propose marriage and undying devotion to any female who voluntarily plays a wargame and puts up a good fight.

4 ON INTELLIGENCE

In order to succeed in any wargame, you must understand the system. Always read the manuals, since even games from the same designer might have very significant changes. In Tiller's black powder-era games, units can fire after expending all their movement points, whereas his more modern games use movement points for both fire and movement. Playing all his games the same way is usually a recipe for disaster.

5 ON PRINCIPLES OF WAR

The military doctrines of the modern world all agree on the importance of surprise and mass. If playing against a real person, study the ground. You should try to approach the enemy unseen or with as much cover as possible. Attack where you are least expected and concentrate at least 3 to 1 odds against the enemy. If you spread yourself thin and attempt to be strong everywhere, you will instead be weak everywhere. Overwhelming force somewhere will allow you to roll up the enemy's flanks or break through the middle, split his army, and defeat him piecemeal.

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Include Me Out!

Why MMORPG is pronounced "More Pigs" By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

As I was meditating in my traditional English rose garden the other day, sipping upon a piping hot cup of a particularly delightful Darjeeling, I thought to myself, "What should I kill by any means necessary to improve not only my life but, by extension, the lives of the worthless curs called 'mankind' whose very presence despoils this green and pleasant planet?" I thereupon began composing a list of things the world would be better without: movies starring chimps as unlikely sports stars, Tyne Daly, the designated hitter, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games. And while my peculiar but easily suggestible Uncle Richard has already promised to deal personally with the "Daly Dilemma," there's precious little I can do about the rest. Except the MMORPGs, and what I propose is this: Everybody follow my lead and stop playing them now.

If this is the future of gaming, then the future of PC gaming is an anesthetized demi-world where narcotized gamers are reduced to monthly fee-paying veal calves. These products are as far from fun as Tyne Daly is from mankind's current rung on the evolutionary ladder (memo to self: explore possibility of pitching movie featuring Tyne Daly as unlikely sports hero). Whose bright idea was it to create a virtual world and then invite every halfwit with a credit card to join in? I already participate in a massively multiplayer game called My Hellish Daily Life, and the last thing I need to do is spend time interacting with the pretentious suspender-wearing cretinous captain of industry holding up the Starbucks line because he's imperiously holding up one finger to shush the barista while he chats with Chuck on his super-slim cell phone—just because this clown decides to go online and call himself Lorrick the Impudent, I'm supposed to chuckle good-naturedly and be his pal? I don't think so. And don't start telling me about PvP servers; until My Hellish Daily Life features PvP, I'm just not interested.

Quite frankly, these games are the laziest pieces of work known to man. If MMORPG designers were held to the same standards as other manufacturers they'd be issuing recalls about five seconds after going live. Instead, they cough up half-finished games with half-slapped-together

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servers to eat up half your discretionary income. At this year's D.I.C.E. summit, the group working on *Star Wars Galaxies* confessed they are counting on the hardcore gamers to create the infrastructure and social framework for their game—having thus shunted off responsibility for the most important part of their product to pants-wetting fanboys they have commenced cutting features in order to keep missing their original ship date. *The Sims Online* was relying on players to create a bright and vibrant world as well, and look how great that turned out. Despite my creeping sense of dread, I wouldn't call *Galaxies* a debacle in the making—but don't let that stop you.

Pop quiz: What game is this? "You are one of three factions fighting for dominance in a world torn asunder." Is it *Asheron's Call 2*, *Earth & Beyond*, or *Anarchy Online*?

And that points to the biggest problem with these games: They're all the same and they're all the same in most of the bad ways. Each and every title bends over backward to make sure the early game experience actively discourages you from playing. For the love of God, if you're making one of these games, liven up the first part so gamers aren't rat-bashing for hours (and making your rats bipeds and calling them drudges doesn't count). Why should I pay $9.95 a month to kill rats when I can club the vermin feasting on what I like to call "The Hitchhiker Study" in my crawlspace for free? Mix it up a bit, give us laser beam-shooting rats, or, better yet, make a whole army of flesh-eating Tyne Daly zombies and equip gamers with an ice pick and some rock salt.

That's something I'd pay $12.95 a month to do.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK HORNADY

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